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Sara Bard Field
POET AND SUFFRAGIST

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SARA BARD FIELD
CA. 1920

Photograph by W.E. Dasonville

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University of California
Berkeley, California

Suffragists Oral History Project

Sara Bard Field

POET AND SUFFRAGIST

With an Introduction by
Dorothy Erskine

An Interview Conducted by
Amelia R. Fry
1959-1963

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE TO SUFFRAGISTS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Suffragists Oral History Project was designed to tape record interviews with the leaders of the woman's suffrage movement in order to document their activities in behalf of passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and their continuing careers as leaders of movements for welfare and labor reform, world peace, and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Because the existing documentation of the suffrage struggle indicates a need for additional material on the campaign of the National Woman's Party, the contribution of this small but highly active group has been the major focus of the series.

The project, underwritten by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, enabled the Regional Oral History Office to record first-hand accounts of this early period in the development of women's rights with twelve women representing both the leadership and the rank and file of the movement. Five held important positions in the National Woman's Party. They are Sara Bard Field, Burnita Shelton Matthews, Alice Paul, Rebecca Hourwich Reyher, and Mabel Vernon. Seven interviews are with women who campaigned for suffrage at state and local levels, working with other suffrage organizations. Among this group is Jeannette Rankin, who capped a successful campaign for suffrage in Montana with election to the House of Representatives, the first woman to achieve this distinction. Others are Valeska Bary, Jessie Haver Butler, Miriam Allen de Ford, Ernestine Kettler, Laura Ellsworth Seiler, and Sylvie Thygeson.

Planning for the Suffragists Project and some preliminary interviews had been undertaken prior to receipt of the grant. The age of the women--74 to 104--was a compelling motivation. A number of these interviews were conducted by Sherna Gluck, Director of the Feminist History Research Project in Los Angeles, who has been recording interviews with women active in the suffrage campaigns and the early labor movement. Jacqueline Parker, who was doing post-doctoral research on the history of the social welfare movement, taped interviews with Valeska Bary. A small grant from a local donor permitted Malca Chall to record four sessions with Jeannette Rankin. Both Valeska Bary and Jeannette Rankin died within a few months of their last interviewing session.

The grant request submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation covered funding both to complete these already-recorded interviews and to broaden the scope and enrich the value of the project by the inclusion of several women not part of the leadership. The grant, made in April, 1973, also provided for the deposit of all the completed interviews in five major manuscript repositories which collect women's history materials.

In the process of research, a conference with Anita Politzer (who served more than three decades in the highest offices of the National Woman's Party, but was not well enough to tape record that story) produced the entire series of Equal Rights and those volumes of the Suffragist missing from Alice Paul's collection; negotiations are currently underway so that these in-party organs can be available to scholars everywhere.

The Suffragists Project as conceived by the Regional Oral History Office is to be the first unit in a series on women in politics. Unit two will focus on interviews with politically active and successful women who are incumbents in elective office today.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Malca Chall, Director
Suffragists Oral History Project

Amelia Fry, Interviewer-Editor

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

2 January 1974
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BARY, Helen Valeska. Labor Administration and Social Security: A Woman's Life. 1974

MATTHEWS, Burnita Shelton. Pathfinder in the Legal Aspects of Women. 1975

PAUL, Alice. Conversations with Alice Paul: An Autobiography. 1975

RANKIN, Jeannette. Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government. 1974

REYHER, Rebecca Hourwich. Search and Struggle for Equality and Independence. 1977

The Suffragists: From Tea-Parties to Prison. 1975

Thygeson, Sylvie, "In the Parlor"

Butler, Jessie Haver, "On the Platform"

deFord, Miriam Allen, "In the Streets"

Seiler, Laura Ellsworth, "On the Soapbox"

Kettler, Ernestine, "Behind Bars"

VERNON, Mabel. The Suffrage Campaign, Peace and International Relations. 1975

FIELD, Sara Bard. Poet and Suffragist. 1979

INTRODUCTION

It was in the twenties that Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood left Portland, Oregon, and came to live in the San Francisco Bay region--first in San Francisco on the east side of Russian Hill and later on a hilltop beside the highway in Santa Clara County, which stretches from the town of Los Gatos to the coast near Santa Cruz. There they built a singular house, quite beautiful in its way. At the entrance on the highway were two white cats, heroic in size, seated on their haunches, one on each side of the road which led steeply upward to the house. These animals gave the place its name, "The Cats."

It was not long before "The Cats" became the gathering place for artists of all kinds, but particularly for the arts of poetry and of music. It was the beginning of a special era springing from the personalities of Erskine and Sara. Both of these people were notable individuals. They were intellectuals--true--but with a vast capacity to love, not only one another, as was clear, but to love ideas, people, causes, the good earth, the arts. Both were magnetic. Entering their home, one entered love. And it is remarkable and significant what happens in such an atmosphere. People open up, come alive. Unused gifts seem to come out. People change and shine.

To begin with, most of those who came to "The Cats" were unusual. When they entered that place they knew at once they would be understood and appreciated. There were characters like Lincoln Steffens, Robinson Jeffers, Helen and Ainsley Salz, John Steinbeck, Ansel Adams, Ernst Bacon, Ella Winters, and many more. Noël Sullivan asked if he could bring my husband and me. Maybe one or two had just returned from trips to the Soviet Union, China, or Africa. But in any case, all who might arrive knew that here they could speak from the heart, and did. Friendships were made then and continue to this day. Each came away from that house on the hilltop released from the ordinary banalities, and moved, for a time at least, on a level that was free and exciting, more honest, more ample.

What Sara cared for most was poetry. However, her greatest contribution may not have been as a poet, but as a mature, courageous, passionate individual. Her extraordinary combination of qualities could exist. She proved it by her presence and the love she gave and received from those who knew her. Her greatest gift, perhaps, was her personality--generous, compassionate, enthusiastic, affectionate. She set us free because she herself was free and untrammelled. She could write--true--but most of all she could live and sustain the reach of her mind and heart. She

could be whole. An example of her poetry is "Song" from The Pale Woman:

What you have seen to love in me
 I do not know.
 What I have seen to love in thee
 No word can show.
 But word or knowledge, dear, we lay aside.
 We need them not for compass or for guide.
 By love we go.

As to Erskine, he was an attorney noted for his ability and the wide variety of his clients. One day he might advise or defend in court some IWW (or Wobblie) outfit for a labor union. The next he might represent a big corporation, railroad, or industry. To one he would waive his fee and to the other perhaps charge \$50,000. But he won his cases. Those in power wanted a winner and they had him in Charles Erskine Scott Wood.

This man whose sympathies were with the underdog and the radicals could hold his own with the powers that be. But he was at heart an artist. He wrote, among other works, The Poet in the Desert and two political satires, Too Much Government and Heavenly Discourse. In temperament he was expansive, with a ready wit and a contagious laugh. He was good looking and dressed in a casual way—a character, a man of courage, originality, and charm, great charm. His love of nature comes out in this piece from his book Poems from the Range.

First Snow

The cows are bawling in the mountains,
 The snow flakes fall,
 They are leaving the pools and pebbled fountains,
 Troubled they bawl.
 They are winding down the mountain's shoulders
 Through the open pines,
 The wild rose thicket, the granite boulders,
 In broken lines.
 Each calf trots close beside its mother,
 And so they go
 Bawling and calling to one another
 About the snow.

Yes, it was a great experience to go some weekend to "The Cats." There was always music there created by those who happened to be there. Poetry was read and discussed. A long table in their studio-living room was set out with bread, cheese, salad and cold meat. Always good company. That was the secret of the animation and laughter. It might be Erskine telling a story or Marie Welch reading her latest poem. George West, the liberal editor of the San Francisco News, was usually there, debating current

happenings. He and Marie Welch met there, fell in love, and married. As I have said before, when you walked into that home, you walked into love.

I remember hearing Sara read her poem, "Preparation," which attests to her openness to all life's experience and may serve as a final word from her.

To drop our leaves of sense;
Sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell,
Before death's imminence
Is wise--is gently well.
Leaf thirst for sun, rain, sap, and air is deep;
Bare branches only ask for sleep.

Dorothy Erskine

San Francisco
December 1978

INTERVIEW HISTORY

- Dates of Sessions: Forty-six sessions were recorded between October 1, 1959 and October 31, 1963. See chart of sessions for individual dates and tapes.
- Interviews: Conducted by Amelia Fry
Introduction by Dorothy Erskine
Edited by Anne Brower
Biographical Summary and Time Line by Catherine Scholten
- Those Present: Sara Bard Field and Interviewer Fry except where otherwise noted.

The interview:

Professor James D. Hart and some of his colleagues in Berkeley's department of English suggested in 1954 that the fledgling Regional Cultural History Office interview Sara Bard Field because of her combined significance: a poet, a leading suffragist and social reformer, and, with husband Charles Erskine Scott Wood, a hostess to visiting literati and artists who came to visit at their estate, "The Cats," fifty miles south of San Francisco.

The Regional Cultural History Office, new at the oral history process, had a set budgetary limit of three sessions for the memoir. Sara felt from the first that taping conversation was no way to preserve an autobiography in the literary perfection of language to which she was accustomed, and the pressure of the time limitation added to her doubts. However, when her son-in-law, English professor James Caldwell, agreed to co-interview with RCHP's Corinne Gilb, Sara undertook to tape two sessions, but when the transcript was sent to her for review, a long hiatus settled over the project. Nonetheless those early sessions provided a valuable starting point and a guide for planning the fuller memoir that was begun five years later, in 1959. Also valuable in the latter preparations were thirty-odd starting pages of an autobiography that Sara had written for publication some years earlier--before negotiations with Random House publishers had stalemated.

Sara and I had first planned to expand only a few sections of the interview she had recorded with Gilb and Caldwell. Then Sara suggested that much more should be said about Charles Erskine Scott Wood and the beginnings of their relationship. We needed also to include the story of her speech delivered in the company of Jane Addams, Alice Paul, and other guests in the Capitol rotunda to celebrate the suffrage victory; and Sara

wanted to expand on Erskine's attitude towards human rights, jurisprudence, and society.* The full story of her work with Tom Johnson of Cleveland, the first socialist mayor in the United States, was of obvious historical significance; Sara wanted the interview to be a catalyst for more research on her genealogy; and more on her first husband's relationship to the children was a must. I suggested adding a section devoted to Erskine's writing that she had helped with and Sara agreed, adding that also a "summing up" was needed "on the more general and impersonal psychological effects of my experiences in the Orient." She was willing also to "develop anything regarding the birth of Albert that is not too personal." And so on. When it became apparent that inserts were going to outweigh the original interview, we agreed to reverse the process: simply tape her memoirs from beginning to end, inserting whatever we could from her previous transcript. This method would provide more unity and coherence, qualities which were uppermost in Sara's poet-mind as a basic requirement for our project. After all was said and typed, the finished manuscript contained one insert from the Gilb-Wood interview, the crucial section on Sara's religious beliefs.

Sara was given a carrel in The Bancroft Library, where she came regularly to do her own research for the interview, beginning with attempts to trace her genealogy. After several planning sessions, the events, themes, and persons in her life took shape and formed a skeletal structure with which she felt comfortable and which was to be more significant than we then realized. In fact, that grand plan, laid out on our 3x5 cards, may well have been the major factor in enabling the sessions to proceed with some degree of continuity in spite of many setbacks and hiatuses due to Sara's recurring and chronic health problems.

During the interview process, we enjoyed the encouragement and advice from other minds on campus who generously contributed their knowledge. In The Bancroft Library at that time were scholars who interrupted their own writing to exchange their research for some on-the-scene reminiscences of Sara's: Richard Hindman Frost on the subject of Tom Mooney, Father Robert Brophy and his developing thesis about Robinson Jeffers. Brophy agreed to serve as guest interviewer for a session on Sara's fellow poet, and the resulting transcript is appended here.

* "[We should tell] of Erskine's Communist friends who came down to try and convince him the trials and purges of the old Bolsheviks were justified and E[rskine]'s outraged explanations that trials as known in all civilized countries had been the slow growth of centuries, measuring, as in England and in our country, the highest development to date in jurisprudence."
--memo Field to Fry, n.d. (ca. September 1959)

When Sara was struggling to decide whether she could bear to include the 1918 death of her son, Albert, we were faced with a difficult question. Was the pain of recall worth the documentation? Her uncertainty was understandable, for although many of her poems are built upon memories of and grief for Albert, she said she had never been able to tell the story of the awful event in conversation. Professor Henry F. May* came to the Regional Cultural History Office to discuss, in general and abstract terms, the underlying question of criteria of significance, after which Sara and I examined the relative importance of the tragedy to the total autobiography. She made her decision: because the accident had such a far-reaching impact on her poetry, on her beliefs, on every facet of her life, in fact, and on the lives of all around her, the unity of the entire memoir would be badly marred if she omitted the account. She resolved to try, and the result is both her touching record of the 1918 episode and her 1962 emotional responses to that memory.

Most of our interviews were held in Sara's creekside home at 40 Severance Avenue on the Berkeley-Oakland boundary. As a widow, she had moved there with art treasures and furniture that she and Erskine had collected, secure in the belief that she was fully settled near her daughter's family, the Caldwells, in Berkeley. But Severance is an address that no longer exists, having fallen prey to a complex freeway interchange; indeed, the stress of that move necessitated by the State's purchase of her home, undermined her already fragile health so that afterward the interviews, at her new Hawthorne Terrace home in Berkeley, became much fewer and farther between.

The redwood and glass exterior of the Severance Avenue home, its low-slung profile nestled between creek and trees, the rich woods of its interior, and the expansive patio outdoors provided light and warmth and an aura of gracious welcome for a visitor. We recorded on the patio on those days when sunshine had driven away the arthritis aggravation of Bay Area fog. On other days we recorded in her living room where she sat on a fiercely straight-backed chair that seemed too tall for her petite frame but which gave the much-needed support to her back, injured so long ago in the same accident that had taken the life of her son. Still other times, when she had had a bad night, we learned to record at her bedside, usually a brief session but one which nonetheless pushed us forward one more inch on our master plan.

Actually, as the chart of interviews shows, nearly all our sessions clocked much less recording time than the average oral history. In her soft-spoken way, Sara would first review off-tape what the day's session was to cover. Once the recorder was turned on, her poet's ear commanded

*Henry F. May's The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of our own Time, 1912-1917 (New York: Knopf, 1959), was an important underpinning of the research the interviewer did for Sara's life, which in many ways is a personification of May's thesis.

SARA BARD FIELD: HER PLACE IN HISTORY

Sara Bard Field on occasion pictured herself as a little minister's wife from an ordinary, respectable Detroit family, who somehow came to move in the circles of political and artistic radicals. This image is apt, although it underestimates her own talent and drive as well as her contribution to American social reform and the arts. Field participated, as a lieutenant, in several major reform movements of the twentieth century. Her oral history autobiography is of interest to historians as a document of her activities in Progressive reform, the suffrage campaign, and radical political and artistic movements in the twenties and thirties. It is also a compelling account of one woman's personal development.

Field experienced a conventional childhood and early youth. She grew up quietly in a middle class family of five children. Her father worked as a purchasing agent for a wholesale food business, and her mother managed the house. The strict Baptist rules that ordered family life, and the tensions they generated, are the only remarkable aspect of her youth.

At the age of eighteen, after graduating from high school, Field married a Baptist minister, Albert Ehrgott, and accompanied him to his mission in Rangoon, Burma. Asian life shocked and fascinated Field. She was appalled by the sight of Indians starving before wealthy natives and indifferent colonials, and attracted by the mysticism of Asian religions. She carried her new awareness of inequality back to the United States, and began to work for social reform in Cleveland, Ohio, when her husband was assigned to a poor church there in 1903.

The years that the Ehrgotts lived in Cleveland coincided with the administration of Progressive Mayor Tom Johnson.¹ Field's increasing concern with a practical application of Christianity led her into the fringe of municipal reform, and from her memoirs we can learn why and how one woman participated in the activities that made Cleveland, by common consent, the best governed city in America. Believing that only an informed electorate could regenerate city government, Tom Johnson encouraged public interest in government by staging meetings to discuss civic affairs in a circus tent that moved throughout the city. Field attended these meetings and heard Henry George and Eugene Debs speak in an enthusiastic atmosphere remarkably similar to that of a revival meeting. Johnson also insisted that his subordinates administer ordinary affairs of the city efficiently. His alert aides heard that Field had established a soup kitchen and a kindergarten

at her husband's church, and soon they invited her to visit the mayor at city hall. Johnson's secretary then requested that she help the municipal campaign by lecturing to women's clubs on the theories of Henry George.

Sara Field's sister Mary encouraged her turn to socialism during the Cleveland years and increased her contact with American reformers. Mary, who was then head of Maxwell Street Settlement House, introduced her to social workers in Chicago and to her close friend Clarence Darrow. Mary later moved to New York City and San Francisco as a labor reporter and remained her sister's guide to radical people and ideas.

Field joined the fight for woman suffrage after her family moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1910, and her recollections provide insight into the history of American feminism and the suffrage movement. She worked as the paid state organizer for the campaign that won suffrage in Oregon in 1912, and later spoke throughout the country for the National Woman's Party. In her memoirs Field described the activities, particularly the publicity-attracting schemes, of the group of young women who revitalized the suffrage movement in the first decades of this century. The names of Field's friends and fellow workers are prominent. She knew Alice Paul, Emma Wold, Anne Martin, Mabel Vernon, Doris Stevens, Charlotte Anita Whitney, and Alva Belmont.

What emerges from Field's history, however, is the experience of a woman who was in many ways typical of suffrage workers. Few shared Alice Paul's total devotion to the cause. Although an energetic worker and thoroughly committed to obtaining votes for women, Field tried to balance her personal life with the campaign. Her account of her activities helps to answer the question of what happened to feminism in America in the 1920s. In 1920 Field was exhausted after ten years working in often physically grueling campaigns. She had spent several summers traveling throughout Oregon, speaking on street corners in small towns, and she remembered that there were weeks during these trips when she lived on bananas because they seemed the only safe food to eat. She followed her difficult three-month transcontinental auto journey to petition President Wilson in 1915 with trips to Woman's Party conventions, other visits to petition the President and Congress, and election campaign tours. The cartoon of a sleeping woman captioned "Every Good Suffragist the Morning After Ratification," which appeared in The Suffragist, described the condition of Sara Bard Field.²

Like the great number of suffragists who for years had focused intensely on the single issue of the vote, Field turned to other pursuits in the twenties. The resistance of the Woman's Party to work for the cause of world peace in addition to the primary goal of women's rights further encouraged Field's turn to private life. She concentrated on her poetry, which appeared in political and literary magazines, and produced two collections and one long narrative poem. Field gained a new group of friends, whose names are familiar in the record of American arts and politics: Lincoln Steffens, Fremont Older, Robinson Jeffers, John Steinbeck, William Rose Benet, Genevieve Taggard, Ansel Adams, and Ralph Stackpole.

Field's friendship with these people derived from her companionship with Charles Erskine Scott Wood, with whom she had formed a deep attachment shortly after she moved to Portland. Clarence Darrow had introduced Field as a fellow radical to Wood, a corporate lawyer and a philosophical anarchist. Wood solicited Field's advice about his unpublished poetry and edited some of her work, thereby initiating a thirty-five-year literary collaboration. They began living together in San Francisco in 1918, when Wood retired from his legal practice and separated from his wife, who refused him a divorce. Wood's poetry and essays of social criticism gained recognition, and the home that Field and Wood shared in San Francisco became a salon for writers and artists in the Bay Area. The visitors followed them to "The Cats," the home that they built in the Los Gatos hills in 1925. Friends sought the atmosphere of tolerance, warmth, and intellectual excitement at "The Cats," which Field describes, as well as their support for politically radical causes.

Field recorded her role in Progressive urban reform, in the campaign for woman suffrage, and in California literary life. However, Field's account is more than the sum of her contacts with eminent men and women. Her oral history is a record of a life characterized by emotional turmoil, much of which sprang from her struggle to reconcile her orthodox Christianity and prevailing social conventions with the human quest for freedom. Her attempt to resolve this conflict led her into social reform and into an unconventional private life. She endured a separation from her family in order to be with Wood, and later the pain became a profound shock when an automobile accident killed her young son. She left a poetic record of her struggle to understand his death after she regained her equanimity. Field also achieved an extraordinary harmony with Wood during the years they lived together. Consequently, Sara Bard Field experienced emotional extremes, and her history is a moving personal story as well as a record of American public life.

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¹ Johnson, Tom Loftin, " Dictionary of American Biography (New York: 1933), Vol. 10, 122-124.

² Cartoon by Nina Allender reproduced in Inez Haynes Irwin, The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party (1921; reprint, Fairfax, Va.: 1977), 485.

SARA BARD FIELD--CHRONOLOGY

September 1, 1882	Sara Bard Field born, Cincinnati, Ohio. Daughter of George Bard Field and Annie Jenkins (Stevens) Field
1885	family of George Field moves to Detroit, Michigan
spring 1900	Sara Bard Field graduates from Detroit Central High School
September 12, 1900	Sara Bard Field marries Reverend Albert Ehrgott, leaves for Eurasian Baptist Church in Rangoon, Burma
1901	in Burma
July 20, 1901	son Albert Field Ehrgott born
fall 1901	Sara Bard Field returns to United States
winter 1901 - 1902	Sara Bard Field has surgical repair of injuries resulting from Albert's birth
summer 1902	Ehrgott family in Wallingford, Connecticut
fall 1902 -1903	Ehrgott family in New Haven, Connecticut. Sara Bard Field audits Robert Lounsbury's poetry course at Yale
1903 - 1910	in Cleveland, Ohio
April 11, 1906	daughter Katherine Louise Ehrgott born
spring - summer 1910	Ehrgott family moves to Portland, Oregon
fall 1910 (October ?)	Sara Bard Field introduced to Charles Erskine Scott Wood

- spring - summer 1911 Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood discuss personal feelings
- 1911 - 1912 Sara Bard Field works for the Oregon College Equal Suffrage League. Travels on summer campaigns, 1911, 1912
- October - December 1911 covers McNamara brothers' trial in Los Angeles, California, for Portland Oregon Journal
- winter 1912 - 1913 Sara Bard Field in Pasadena, California, tuberculosis sanitarium
- 1913 Sara Bard Field moves to Goldfield, Nevada, with daughter Katherine, to wait for divorce
- 1913 - 1914 campaigns for suffrage in Nevada
- 1914 Sara Bard Field moves to San Francisco, California
- November 1914 Sara Bard Field receives divorce from Albert Ehrgott
- 1915 - 1918 National suffrage work
- 1915 - summer, Sara Bard Field works at Congressional Union booth at Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco
- 1915 - September 16-December 6, 1915 transcontinental journey with petition to President Wilson
- 1916 - June - National Woman's Party convention in Chicago. Sara Bard Field speaks
- 1916 - National presidential campaign, Sara Bard Field speaks for Woman's Party
- 1917 - January - Sara Bard Field in deputation to President Wilson
- 1917 - July - Peace meeting in San Francisco, Sara Bard Field speaks at Dreamland Park

1915 - 1918	National suffrage work
	1918 - summer - Sara Bard Field campaigns for Anne Martin in Nevada senatorial race
1918 -	Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood begin life together in San Francisco
October 12, 1918	Sara Bard Field's son, Albert Field Ehr Gott, killed in an automobile accident
fall 1918 - 1919	Sara Bard Field suffers a nervous breakdown
June 1919	Democratic national convention in San Francisco. Sara Bard Field covers it for combined labor papers of the west
February 15, 1921	Sara Bard Field in Washington, D.C. for dedication of memorial busts of three suffrage leaders
1920 - 1924	Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood maintain home in San Francisco
1923 - 1924	Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood sponsor School of the Arts of the Theater in San Francisco
1924	Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood travel in Europe
1925	Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood move to "The Cats" in Los Gatos, California
1927	<u>The Pale Woman</u> published
1932	<u>Barabbas</u> published. Awarded the Book Club of California gold medal for the best book written by a Californian that year
1936	<u>Darkling Plain</u> published
January 20, 1938	Sara Bard Field marries Charles Erskine Scott Wood
January 22, 1944	Charles Erskine Scott Wood dies

- 1949 Charles Erskine Scott Wood's Collected Poems,
edited by Sara Bard Field, published
- 1955 Sara Bard Field moves to Berkeley, California
- October 1959 - October 1963 Regional Oral History Office, University of
California at Berkeley, tapes Sara Bard
Field's oral history
- June 15, 1974 Sara Bard Field dies in Berkeley, California

San Francisco Chronicle
June 18, 1974

Sara Bard Field Wood, Poet, Dies

Sara Bard Field Wood, a distinguished poet, civil libertarian and early-day feminist, died Saturday at her home in Berkeley at the age of 91.

Mrs. Wood was the widow of Charles Erskine Scott Wood, an Indian fighter who became an admiralty lawyer and earned a fortune before turning to writing. Mr. Wood died in 1944, also at the age of 91.

During their life together, Mrs. Wood and her husband held court at the 34-acre estate in Los Gatos they called "the Cats," named for the sculptured figures that guarded the winding entrance way.

There they entertained a host of noted thinkers, artists, writers and musicians including Lincoln Steffens, Fremont Older, Robinson Jeffers, William Rose Benet and Yehudi Menuhin.

Mrs. Wood began campaigning for the women's vote in 1912 and at one time drove across country on a speaking tour, ending when she presented President Woodrow Wilson with four miles of petitions containing signatures.

She also spoke out on behalf of birth control, a subject so controversial in those days that she was threatened with arrest.

Mrs. Wood later turned to poetry and in 1927 published "The Pale Woman," followed five years later by a long narrative poem called "Barabbas," which won a Commonwealth Club gold medal. In 1936, her final collection of verse, "Darling Plain," was published.

She is survived by a daughter, Mrs. James R. Caldwell of Berkeley; a sister, Marion Field of Berkeley; two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Mrs. Wood lived at 1439 Hawthorne terrace.

Funeral services were private. Contributions to the American Civil Liberties Union, the University of California at Berkeley and Save the Redwoods League are requested.

I FOREBEARS AND FAMILY

[October 1, 1959]

Grandparents: Quakers and Baptists

Fry: How far back do you know anything about your ancestors?

Field: I'm sorry to say not very far back. I hope later to be able to find sources that will tell me more because they did interesting things. On my mother's side, there were certainly members who had something to do with the founding of Swarthmore College, for instance, and I haven't the details of that, nor can I state yet the actual facts. But I do know that they were of liberal Quaker stock. They never seemed to have been fanatical about their belief in Quakerism. My own mother and grandmother, on her side, are remembered in the most delightful way as having a kind of ease about life and as finding in their religion a source of strength in their beliefs in brotherhood and in absolutely no war (they were against war in every war) and in toleration of the races.

I have never known any discrimination in my family. It's true there wasn't occasion for much expression of this because in my childhood the Negroes, for instance, were not very numerous in the North. But whenever any chance came to have perhaps a visiting Chinese or--in one instance I remember a Japanese visitor--at the house, they were always treated in an extremely cordial way.

Fry: Were these Quakers--your ancestors--also the type of Quaker who believes in a certain amount of religious freedom and individual variation in belief, or were they the kind who had a pretty well set structure of beliefs that all Quakers should believe in? How much variation was allowed?

Field: Yes. I think they were the kind that believed in never

- Field: interfering with anyone else's beliefs whatsoever. They had their own views and they were loyal to those but not with any sense of wanting to proselytize. Of course, my mother's family were the Rhode Island Quakers, and their history runs in a different stream from the Pennsylvania Quakers. And I think, as I contemplate it, that the Rhode Island Quakers were particularly liberal. They seemed to have no more strict concepts than a belief in the inner light, which was an expression they preferred to God, I suppose. The inner light was God, and that has come to mean a great deal to me in my later life of interest in Hindu philosophy because that is exactly what is taught in Hindu philosophy, that if we do not find God within ourselves, we cannot find Him anywhere else.
- Fry: You can't achieve Nirvana?
- Field: No.
- Fry: Yes, there is that similarity there.
- Field: My mother was a person of great adaptability. I think that since I have made a rather extensive study of Emily Dickinson and her poetry I find a key to my mother's nature in it, something both serious and whimsical.
- My father was a very different type. He came of Baptist background. I knew very little of his ancestors except that they came from New York state out to Ohio, I would say, three generations before me, or maybe two. And there are traces in New York state of the family. For instance, I was named for my paternal grandfather--I mean grandmother--I guess I wished to have been a boy--for my paternal grandmother, Sara Bard Field, or Sara Bard, as she was before her marriage. And there's a Bard College in New York state which I have heard rumors of having been founded by some of her ancestors.
- I know that she--who died in my infancy, so I never knew her personally--was a woman of a great deal of education for her time. Now, how she attained it I don't know. But when her husband, William Field, died she was able to open a school in Columbus, Ohio, for boys. And the school, of course with many changes and modifications, still, I believe, exists.
- Fry: What did she call it?
- Field: I don't know. I would have to discover that. She was forced to bring up these six boys with what she earned in that school, because my grandfather died quite young. He was a prosperous

- Field: lawyer, but he was only in his middle forties when he died.
- Fry: As I remember from reading the first chapter in your autobiography, your grandfather's partner more or less took a great deal of property and money that belonged--
- Field: That was my maternal grandfather. He also died young. On both sides my grandmothers became widows very young. My maternal grandfather would have been a man of much means because he was also a lawyer, in Providence, Rhode Island, and very successful, and had invested in the Calumet and Hecla copper mines which made fortunes for people, and in that day was just beginning to prosper.
- My grandfather died rather suddenly of blood poisoning. They couldn't check it in those days and it spread very rapidly. Faced with death, he called in his law partner and gave him power of attorney, and of course that practically put him in possession of everything. He manipulated the affairs so that he at least had the kindness not to deprive my grandmother of enough to bring up her girls and two sons. But he made away with most of the fortune.
- Fry: A great deal that she should have had.
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: This was Mr. Stevens who died from blood poisoning?
- Field: That's true, and the other was William Field. What he died of, I don't know.
- Fry: You also speak in your autobiography of the almost gay, light-heartedness of the Stevens girls in Rhode Island.
- Field: Yes. They were just noted for it as late as 1916 when I went back to speak in Providence for women's suffrage. I took occasion to go over to the old house on Waterman Street, which was right next to Brown University and where the Brown University boys used to come in great numbers. Even in their poverty, or semipoverty, they did have a good house, but were not affluent at all. In that semipoverty they made over their dresses. They could all sew. They had a spirit and a drive that just lifted them above their fellows and made [them] very delightful. I mean gay in the sense of not, what we would say today.

My grandfather did have a cellar. He was a good liver. He was one of those Quakers who believed in the good life in

Field: every way. But I think my grandmother was very abstemious, and exactly whether there was any of that left in the youths, but I'm not thinking a bit in those terms as they do today with alcohol and louder fun. They just thought that all the natural things, the picnics, in the winter skating on ponds, and being allowed to go up to New York.

Parents and their Siblings

My mother and her sisters too had made a great many well-to-do young friends in Friends' School. It was a popular school to send girls to in those days, just outside of Providence. The girls used to manage to get up to New York to visit these friends of theirs, so I think that they really had a very happy life.

Their father's death was a great loss to them, because he was devoted to his girls. He had two sons also. I keep speaking of girls because I know so little about my relatives in the family other than the daughters. I think that one of them [the sons] was pretty addicted to the bottle in his older young years. Perhaps that's why I never talked too much about them and I never did see them.

Fry: This was the uncle who wasn't mentioned very much?

Field: There were two uncles. One was married into the Alden family, the famous John Alden of the Puritan times, who came over, I believe, on the Mayflower--although they say the Mayflower must have been as big as the Queen Mary to accommodate all the ancestors that claimed to have come over on it, or their descendants claim, but this was pretty well established.

Fry: That's interesting. I was just talking to another descendant of John Alden the other day. He was right here in Berkeley too, Professor Leon J. Richardson, so you may have a relation there.

Field: Maybe I have. That would only be a relation by marriage, though, not in the blood because it was a marriage of an Alden to my uncle. I think his name was Charley. For some reason, the mention of the brothers was always very strained.

Fry: They remained in the East, I take it, so that you would have no contact?

Field: They did. No, we had no contact with them. But I knew all

Field: the sisters well, my Aunt Elizabeth, Aunt Martha, and my Aunt Ida.

Fry: Am I right in saying that Aunt Martha was your aunt in two ways? She married your father's brother? Is that right?

Field: She did, and the children of both families were almost as close as brothers and sisters. We loved each other very dearly, we cousins, double cousins we were.

Fry: Oh, you lived close to them?

Field: Close enough to visit. They lived in Ohio during my childhood, in a town. I've forgotten the name. We used to love to go there to visit. Then they'd come and visit us in Detroit.

Fry: That was so interesting when I read in your autobiography about your father and his brother both falling in love with the Stevens girls. Did they have a double marriage ceremony?

Field: No, my Uncle Tom was married some time before my father and my mother were married.

Fry: So Tom led the way?

Field: Yes, but it was due to his going to Brown that my father and mother met--that is, to Tom's going to Brown.

My father wanted very much to be an architect but his finances didn't allow him to do that and help his brother Tom through Brown University, which he did. So Tom had told him that when he got through and had a salary, he would help my father too. But he had fallen for the charming Martha Stevens, and they were married almost immediately and began to have a family almost immediately. There were no funds available for my father, so he never did get that education.

Fry: This was a great frustration for him all his life?

Field: I think it was probably a major frustration because as I look back, though the evidences would seem trifling to any arrived artist maybe, I think he had a decidedly artistic temperament.

His brother Henry painted. He wasn't a good painter, but at least--

Fry: He had that creative desire?

Field: He had that desire, yes. Some people thought Uncle Henry's

- Field: paintings were good. I'm glad to say that even as a child, I thought they were dreadful. For instance, he gave my father and mother a painting of Niagara Falls that always looked to me like a large lady's bustle.
- Fry: [Laughter] Maybe this was the beginnings of Expressionism!
- Field: Maybe it was. And my father had to take his [artistic temperament] out in--well, in creative gardening. I think he was passionately fond of gardening. And in the fact that he always brought back from New Orleans--to which he had to go in the course of his career and stay--he always brought back some new and beautiful music that he had heard. I remember when he brought back the overture to Cavalleria Rusticana, which he had fallen in love with.

He must have played guitar at one time and then not found time to play it as well as he wished, for it always stood in a corner of a little music room in our house as a kind of secret creature, which we weren't even to touch. But I never heard him play.

Early Musical and Literary Interests

- Fry: When he brought back this music, was it music for piano?
- Field: Yes, it would have to be piano because that was the only musical instrument we had. He had seen to it that both my sisters Alice and Mary were given lessons. He told me I could have lessons if I'd stop biting my fingernails. I was a very nervous little child. I stopped. Then he decided that he couldn't give me music lessons and I felt betrayed. I don't know whether I went back to biting my nails or not but I did overcome it finally.
- Fry: Oh, that would be such a terrible experience for a child. It's hard to stop biting your fingernails!
- Field: Yes, it is. And to show you my love of music, I used to hide in the closet--oh, a stifling closet--to listen to Mary's music lesson, Mary being my just-older sister. Then after everyone had gone out of the house, as they sometimes did at night, I'd sit down and try to play whatever piece it was that she had been given instruction on. I really learned to play quite a little bit all by myself with no instruction.

Fry: I thought that you played by ear rather well.

Field: Well, it wasn't what I would want to display to anybody.

Fry: You have a piano in your house now, don't you?

Field: Yes, I couldn't live without it. I don't play it any more. I'm completely out of practice, but my granddaughter plays beautifully, and she never comes without playing. Then I have a good many musical friends who come in and play. Sometimes we have musical afternoons. So we use the piano.

Fry: Did you play a great deal at The Cats just for fun?

Field: No. By that time I had become lost in poetry.

Fry: This was a sort of creative outlet for you then when you were a young lady or a child?

Field: Yes, it was. My mother tells of me at four--of hearing me improvise as I sang my baby brother to sleep. I'd begin with a song that was known and that had been taught me, then I would start improvising, and she said that she took some of it down, but I'm very glad it wasn't preserved.

Fry: This was a cappella? [Laughter]

Field: Yes.

Fry: It's too bad that it's not preserved. Do you remember any of it?

Field: No. The first thing I remember was writing a poem to my Grandmother Stevens, who was very dear to me and lived in Cincinnati with her youngest daughter, Ida. I remember writing a birthday poem to her which compared her with a setting sun. It was a quite touching description of an old lady whose life was going down in beautiful colors like the sunset, as the sun set.

Fry: That's really quite a figure for a little girl to think about.

Field: I'm proud of it.

Fry: You don't remember the exact words, do you?

Field: I suppose I could if I thought long enough because I worked very hard over it.

Fry: I wish you could and give them to us.

Field: They may come back.

Fry: So you came by some creative spark, then, logically probably through your father's side.

Field: Yes. Well, I think any creative spark on the literary side really came down through my mother's side of the family. My Aunt Ida wrote perfectly charming songs for kindergarten children. She opened the first kindergarten that was ever opened in the Middle West, in Cincinnati. She wrote a number of the songs that are sung today. She didn't care anything about being famous; anonymity suited her Quaker quietness much better. They are all listed under "Anonymous." But I recognize them as her songs when I hear them sung in kindergarten.

Fry: What are some of them? I bet I know some of them.

Field: One of them was about the ocean. The children would put their little white handkerchiefs on their heads, and nod them singing to a refrain of each verse. "Every little wave had its nightcap on, nightcap, white cap, nightcap on." You see, very much in the myriad of efforts of today, with the repetitions and so on.

Then there's a miner's song about going down into the mines.

You see, the old idea of the kindergarten, as far as she was concerned, was to acquaint children with the world they were going to live in and what labor it took to keep it going.

Fry: Well, that's still a very modern idea, at least in the elementary schools.

Field: Yes, I know it is, and I think a great deal of this was her initiative.

So I think on the literary side maybe that has to be attributed to my mother's side. If there had been any artistic expression, which I didn't have, I think that would have more likely been my father's blood, his contribution. But my mother was passionately fond of books. She read and was one of the best-read women, I think, of her time. She early introduced us children to the great English literature.

Those were the days, too, you see, when you didn't have automobiles and run around at night. There was no electricity in the houses. It was all gaslight. We sat around a large

Field: oil lamp in what was called the sitting room. There was a parlor which was only kept for guests. There was a kind of a cold frigidity in it. Everything was just in place.

The living room, or as we call it now, the sitting room, was warm and pleasant. We would sit around the table and my sister Mary would make her exquisite paper dolls which she sold at the women's exchange for a little pin money. My sister Alice would embroider. My mother would probably be mending stockings. And I was the reader. Many a roar of laughter went up at my mispronouncement of words, but I early learned to read aloud and to read good books. We read Dickens and Thackeray and Scott and even some of the more difficult ones such as George Eliot, because she is difficult in her long digressions on moral issues. But I feel very grateful for that background and also the Bible. We all hated it at the time, but I wouldn't give anything now for the experience and enrichment of the Bible because after you grow old, you can make your own interpretations, and there you have all that richness stored up in you.

I was amused the other day when Dr. Hart came to visit me-- probably one of the most learned men that the University has had, Walter Morris Hart. He said, "I've been trying and trying to find out where the lines come from, "Visiting the sins of the fathers on the third and fourth generation." I said, "I can tell you: it's in Numbers 6:2, I think." He looked at me perfectly astonished. I went and got the Bible. I may have been a little wrong on the chapter. I can't remember now. But there it was. I read it to him. He copied it down gatefully and with much astonishment.

Fry: You more or less really discovered it [the Bible] and found new value in it later on?

Field: I did indeed. I also remember taking a wonderful course of lectures in later years when I was still a minister's wife and we were living in Cleveland. A man from Toronto University came and lectured on the evolution of the idea of God in the Bible. I was ready for that at that time.

Fry: Was this in your church?

Field: No, with the Western Reserve University there, he was a learned man. I found that I had really been casting off the God of vengeance and stern morality that the older books of the Bible contained.

Fry: And that the more modern concept that had evolved really was

Fry: more in line with what you wanted to believe in?

Field: Yes, indeed. I couldn't understand a God that could hate.

Father and the Role of Religion in the Family Life

Fry: Back to your father. He would often read the Bible to you in the mornings before breakfast? Is that where you first--

Field: Yes, we had morning prayers and Bible reading before we went to school, especially prayers. Looking back, I feel that was a very pathetic revelation of father, because his prayers would be so intense and so thoroughly believing in a God that was listening to him. We children would meanwhile be surreptitiously lacing up our shoes, because we were scared of being late to school, while all this passionate praying went on, so that it was a mixture of both comedy and a certain kind of tragedy, too.

Fry: But he must have been a very sensitive person in order to have been so torn by his Victorian sense of duty to bring his family up strictly and in the right way, and on the other hand wanting to be freer and creative in life. Do you think that would be a fair statement about him?

Field: Yes, as much as I can say. He was a man who wasn't understandable to his children and who didn't let them understand him. So I can't really analyze him except as a figure that was frustrated desperately all his life. He hated business. He lived into an era of great change for the worse when adulteration of foods came on. In fact, it came on to such an extent that finally the pure foods law had to be passed. This [adulteration] was a horror to him, and yet his competitors would get ahead of him because they didn't care, and he did.

He not only hated business but he hated having to be away from home. It is curious that we children would just wait for the long periods when he had to do the buying for this great wholesale house for which he worked in New Orleans. He'd be gone a long time. Of course, as long as we children were little, Mother couldn't go with him. In later years, she sometimes did go down and leave us with an English housekeeper that she finally had.

But he wanted to be at home and we wanted to be in something

Field: he could enjoy, I'm sure, and could put his heart into, and he never attained these things in his life.

And when he came home he was remote from us except where it came to discipline, and we all think of him as a disciplinarian. My youngest sister Marion least of all because she lived on at home in the years when he began to grow a little more mellow, and evidently feeling the loss of all the rest of us showed her a more tender side. The fact that he did that, though, showed that he had it, and certainly he had it toward my mother. He tyrannized over her. She was undeniably frightened of him at times, I mean frightened at crossing his will when she should have. But he did love her and the marriage had an unbroken closeness in it.

Fry: So at least you could feel secure in your mother's and father's feelings for each other then?

Field: That's true. I often think, when people say, "How is it that under such a father you didn't go all to pieces nervously?" and I have often said, "I think it was because there was never any doubt of the stability of the home itself." That we were unhappy often in it, yes, but most children are at times. I think too that Mother was so Victorian that she kept all the sadness that must have existed at times in that relationship away from us children. We'd see her crying and we'd just excite ourselves because we loved her so, but we wouldn't know the cause, and she would brush it off as far as we were concerned as nothing important.

Fry: So you weren't anxious about whatever it was?

Field: No.

Fry: Your father's austerity and the severity of his discipline and so forth seem to have been taken out mostly on the first daughter. She actually left home and had a most traumatic type of rebellion, didn't she, Alice?

Field: She did. She's a very old lady now but to this day she shows the results in the fact that she just simply cannot seem to love anybody. The whole area of emotion that we mean by love seemed to have been closed in her. Just why her mother couldn't have opened that as she certainly did with me I don't know. But Alice was very plain-looking, as people used to say in those days, and she had the feminine desire to fix herself up. My father found her one time curling her hair with some hot curling irons, and he made her go and wash it all out, and such things

Field: as that, which were of course sad affronts to a very deep-emotioned young girl coming into her later teens.

Fry: How much older than you was she?

Field: We all came two to three years apart, so she was six years older than I. Then came Mary. Mary was nearer to my age, two years older. No, that's wrong. There was a child who died in between Mary and me. So Mary is four years older than I. Then there was this little baby named Ida for my mother's sister whom she loved so much. She died and I was born then.

Fry: You were how old then when Alice left home, eleven or twelve? Was she about eighteen when she left?

Field: She had just graduated from high school so she must have been about eighteen.

Fry: What I was trying to get at was that this was a very sensitive and impressionable age for you, just before adolescence.

Field: Yes, it was. It was just shocking to all of us because we saw Mother helping Alice pack her trunks to go and crying all the time. We children would ask, "What does all this mean," and she told us that Alice was just going down to visit her aunt. Of course, why everyone was so sad about that we weren't allowed to find out.

Fry: But actually her father had told her to leave, hadn't he? This was not her voluntary idea?

Field: No, no. She disobeyed too often and she couldn't stay. Those were things my father did that were on the sadistic. He had done this to Uncle Charley once--my mother's younger brother--when he came into the house in Cincinnati, I think even before I was born or when I was still a very little baby. He had come a little under the influence of liquor, and my father had just shut the door in his face. Of course that wounded Mother dreadfully.

So you see he had a will of iron that extended into all of that region of wanting--his puritanism spread like a cloak over everybody, a dark cloak.

Dr. Levine who was here two or three winters ago from Harvard lecturing on the power of darkness that has pervaded American literature, understood his feeling because he showed how it crept into Hawthorne and even into Poe, how it's dark

- Field: and foreboding and generally an unhappy interpretation of life, that pleasure in itself was wrong.
- Fry: And that one lives for religion rather than incorporating religion into--
- Field: Your life, yes.
- Fry: Mary was also rebellious but in rather small incidents, is that right? She was courageous and outspoken?
- Field: Yes. She was my father's favorite of the children, I think. Perhaps because of this very quality in her. She was very pretty and witty and alive, and the least afraid of him of any. It got her into trouble lots with him, but just the same I think Mary was his favorite. He let her go to the University of Michigan until he found again that she was losing her religion. She'd come home and she wouldn't go to church. She didn't believe in all that. Then he refused to support her and she had to borrow the money to finish.
- Fry: Mary was the one who had severe misgivings about the powers of God as they had been taught to her as a child? It wasn't just the University of Michigan that did all this?
- Field: I remember very well that incident that I speak of in my writing when she said one day, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to say d-a-m-n and see what'll happen." And I was terrified. I can see the spot we were standing on.
- Fry: What had you been told would happen if you did this?
- Field: We just hadn't been told anything but it made me feel--you see, damn was just about the worst, most awful word that one could say. Then when you said, "Damn God!" that put you into Hell right away. The flames would be bursting all around you. And she stood there and said, "Damn God!" I put my hands up and was so scared and then there was a serene atmosphere all around us, and there was nothing to be worried about, and I saw no flames rising from the ground. It was a shaking experience.
- Fry: How shaking an experience was it for you? Did you follow this to the conclusions that it led you to?
- Field: Nothing ever happens in what you might say a change in your thought instantly, but I haven't a doubt that that occasion was one of the beginnings of my own questioning.
- Fry: You were very young then.

- Field: Pretty young, and I was exposed to much of the sentimental side of religion which I responded to. I remember the hymns to this day. I wish I could get them out of my head--they're awful, the jingle of them.
- Fry: They weren't something to improve your aesthetic sensibilities.
- Field: Not a bit, not a bit. They were the Moody and Sankey type of religious jingle.
- Fry: But you really went along with your religious training, didn't you, for quite a while?
- Field: Yes I did, pretty well up until quite a time even after my marriage. But it was becoming less and less a matter of really deep personal conviction, and one of habit and parrot talk.
- Fry: Did you have any idea as a little girl of the right to believe what you wanted to believe? Or was it that since this was imposed upon you by a very stern father that you couldn't possibly oppose, any thought of questioning it was completely beyond you?
- Field: Well, I think I must have been somewhat confused about this because I remember having quite a crush on a young physics teacher that had come to the high school. He was assistant to dear old Mr. Adams, the great physics teacher. And he began to come up to our house and play croquet, which was a great game of my young days. We had discussions which I remember thinking, "How--" [whispers, inaudible] because we would talk about orthodox religion. He had told me how science had come to make him question the things that he had been brought up to believe, and he wondered if I were doing the same.
- I think that I must have answered yes, that I was. But it wasn't anything that didn't just grow slowly with me. I think I am enough [of a] person to have sudden changes in my thinking.
- Fry: This was pretty deep, too. It wasn't just an intellectual process. It was emotional, too.
- Field: Yes, it was.

Life in Detroit

- Fry: I want to ask you a few things about Detroit, too. You went there about 1885 and stayed until 1900 and in that time--you probably weren't aware of this, but--the population more than doubled.
- Field: Did it really? Now that I didn't know.
- Fry: Apparently the Fields contributed to this!
- Field: No-o-o-o [laughter] although they all probably left, but I only do know this, that no one who knew Detroit as I knew it could dream of it now. It was so lovely. It was half-city, half-town. Every street was tree-lined and the new high school that was built in my time, and of that I guess I should speak because it was quite an event in Detroit history when the old high school burned down, the one and only high school--so you can see what the population was then. It burned down just about the time I was to enter it. I had finished the eighth grade.

It was extremely exciting because they had taken the old Jefferson Hotel way downtown and as rapidly as possible fixed it over--it had been abandoned as a hotel--and fixed it over for classrooms and high school--while they built the new high school, which was called then the Detroit Central High School because they evidently had some vision that Detroit would draw off beyond where it was, so that it would be a kind of centrally located high school. It took about two years in the building. So I spent about two years in this rather curious kind of place where you used old bedrooms, I suppose, that were large in those days, for classrooms.

Then we entered the fine new high school, and for its day it was extremely modern, very light. I remember it as an awfully well-run high school with an excellent faculty. They seemed not to have had so many subjects as they do now, but they seemed to have gone deeper. I must say that what I learned in high school stuck. The memories of my English teacher are all of a profoundly grateful and reverent type because I learned to love poets that I don't think I would have otherwise, like Milton. He made Milton real to us, and beautiful, and we felt the nobility of his concept and his language. I don't think they do these things nowadays, I'm sorry to say.

But Detroit was just a sleepy kind of half-city.

Field: Although it was in a nice residential section, we lived within walking distance of downtown. I used to get everybody's library card that I could scrape off in the family and walk down to the Detroit Public Library and come back. The neighbors remember me as staggering along the street with this great pile of books which I would devour.

So I think of those days with a good deal of both pleasure and pain now that it is what it is. I never went back but once, after my father died and my mother wanted to be settled there because my only brother, who was married, lived there. And she wanted a permanent place to go out from to visit us all. So I went back to help her find a place and to install her and stock her up with what she would need and so on.

I was so horrified by the changes in the city. The street that I lived on (which was a charming street, as I say), was Charlotte Avenue, and it had become a cheap boardinghouse street. All the trees were gone. The street had been widened for automobiles. The nice-smelling old cedar blocks that had been used for paving in the horse days for horses had of course given way to the modern asphalt.

Mother and I found a place for her to live in out near where what was called the Central High School had been built and that was so surrounded, and miles and miles of city on all sides of it. It was swallowed up. Right on one of the streets near where I used to pick daisies in the fields I saw a man killed by the traffic. It [traffic] was badly managed then.

I went back to the old home, which I had thought of as spacious. I thought of that front porch as just being almost like the deck of the Queen Mary, and I had thought of our yard--which was fairly good-sized--as being like a city lot. And what had been our yard was big enough to have been built on, and the house looked like a squatty old tumbledown slum house. The sense of desolation around it was such that I never want to go back.

Fry: Yes, what a blow that must be.

Field: Yes, it was just dreadful to see it in that condition. The auto has really swept all the beauty out of Detroit. I understand there is still some of it concentrated in Belle Island [Belle Isle], which is the little island you reach by boat. I presume they have a bridge now, the way things are. But in those days not, and we could ride all day for five cents.

Field: You didn't get off the boat. You didn't have to pay again. You'd ride up and down the river. If it was a hot day, it was kind of nice to do.

We spent a great deal of the happier part of our childhood there. There was skating on the canals, which you did in the winter, and rowing on them out into the Detroit River in summer. That, I understand, has been kept, except that it [Belle Isle] has great big pavilions now and all kinds of honky-tonkies and such things.

Fry: Were you aware of the opera house? I noticed that it had just been built when you moved there. It was about three years old, no, fifteen years before you went.

Field: No, in our puritanical life, we didn't know anything about the opera house. It didn't enter our menage at all.

Fry: You were still back with Moody's hymns?

Field: Yes.

Fry: But you did know Belle Isle and--

Field: Grosse Pointe was another beautiful spot. The wealthy lived out there. We had some friends who lived out there. We used to go out summers. My father had a stand of horses which he rented every summer, from a nearby stable. We would have nice visits out at Grosse Pointe. Of course, we couldn't go to Belle Isle by horse but we didn't want to. We loved the ferries which took us over.

Fry: You really enjoyed the horseback riding out there at Grosse Pointe?

Field: Well, yes. My horseback riding was largely because as a little girl I was sent away from home a certain summer, and I wasn't very well or strong, and lived with my mother's former English housekeeper. She had married a Toronto farmer, that is, a farmer who had a farm just on the outskirts of Toronto. I would be sent there, and I think any modern child would feel she was abused because there wasn't a child within range of me, and I was alone all summer. But I never worried because I had a horse. I used to ride bareback, really dangerously, as I look back on it. I became utterly fearless on a horse and of course would weep when I had to leave that horse and go home. Evidently I didn't miss children so much.

Fry: A girl's best friend was there.

Field: Yes.

Fry: Did you go up to Toronto very often?

Field: I went several summers.

Fry: Was this the TB trouble then?

Field: Well, maybe I had some tendency toward it that they didn't know about but I was very, very thin, too thin even for a child, and I didn't have much appetite. I wanted to eat pickles.

Fry: They're not very caloric. And really, it was probably the same thing that made you bite your nails that kept you from eating.

Field: Well, I think so. I think the root of that lay probably in the relationship or lack of relationship with my father, because I think that really ate into my being in a very definite way.

Fry: Yes, it manifested itself in several ways.

[end of interview]

II CHILDHOOD

[October 6, 1959]

Father as Disciplinarian

Fry: Did you really eat better at Toronto or whenever you were away from your father?

Field: Well, of course I wasn't really in Toronto, as I've told you, but in a farm outside of Toronto. I was so young and so little I can't remember whether I did or not there. But certainly I can tell you that when my father's bags were packed for his long stay in New Orleans each year, where he had to do the buying for this large wholesale house which was located in Cincinnati, that the relaxation was felt immediately in the house.

We'd all go through a perfunctory farewell to him and then we'd begin an almost bacchanalian dance. Something was released at once. Tensions were gone, or if not all gone because they are not always so easily disposed of, certainly we were more relaxed. And I feel that that was very sad because he loved his home, but he was a despot in it. And a despot in a home never makes for, you might say, children without tensions.

Fry: When he left then, everybody felt this, not just you, but all your brothers and sisters?

Field: No, we all did, everybody did. There was another atmosphere in the house. My mother, who was of course a believer in the moral laws, was also anxious to guide us aright but her guiding was so gentle and so easy. And if we were caught in some very wicked things such as chewing gum, which was considered very, very bad and no lady would do it; we were just reprovved and told to take it out, and that was all, rather than to have a harsh punishment for a misdemeanor.

Fry: Your father was really a very hard disciplinarian then?

Field: He was a hard disciplinarian. He had evidently been affected very badly by his mother's hard discipline. I never knew her. She died in my infancy. But her oil portrait is not at all what you might call "endearing." She had a face as stern as Medusa's, though I know that she was a very good and able woman, and certainly others of her children were less fanatically hard than my father.

In fact, my Uncle Tom, the one who married Aunt Martha, was more a father to me than my own father. When I went to visit in Illyria, Ohio, where they lived, as I sometimes did in the summers as I grew older, I used to be able to climb on his knee and tell him my troubles. He was gentle, and so were Uncle Albert and other of the boys.

So why my father should have been the one who reacted so severely as far as we children were concerned to his mother's harsh training, I don't know.

But Uncle Tom said to me once, "George (that's my father) was always a strange boy. We didn't understand him very well."

Fry: He had this estrangement from his own family quite early?

Field: Yes, very definitely.

Fry: What a shame, when he had all these talents, artistic talents, and he wanted so much to be happy.

Field: I know. It was one of the tragedies of life that he should be what he was--he was very handsome and very idealistic in his hard way. Certainly at those morning prayers you felt that he had deep feelings within him that were often released when he could talk to God, as he thought.

Fry: Well, you mentioned his gardening too, in your autobiography.

Field: Yes, that was another thing. He used to garden with a kind of sense of desperate release, as if it gave him some deep inner satisfaction. I remember once watching him doing some weeding, and to my astonishment I saw that he was talking to the grass and treating it with very tender hands. I wasn't old enough to understand those things then but in the light of modern psychology, what little I know if it, I do understand it.

Fry: What were some of the dos and don'ts that he had set up?

Field: The dos and don'ts were everywhere. We were expected to close certain doors always. We were expected to always have our rooms in a kind of perfect order regardless of everything else. We were expected, of course, always to be on hand for the meals when the bell rang, and if we weren't we didn't get any food. As we grew older, we were also expected to be in the house, if we went out anywhere, at ten o'clock. It was pretty hard on us.

We were expected to obey instantly. In fact, one of the laws of the house was "prompt obedience and happy obedience." The promptness I think we got more or less frightened enough to observe, but I don't remember the happiness.

Fry: That's something a little hard to just legislate, isn't it?

Field: Yes, it is. I'm very glad though that as I look back now, I feel no resentments as some of my friends do toward a parent who undoubtedly gave them lifelong tensions. I have great understanding of his frustrations and disappointments and feeling of failure in life. He once said to somebody, I don't know to whom it was, that he had never achieved anything in life that he wanted except my mother. All his children, he said, were disappointments to him.

Fry: He had wanted boys, isn't that right?

Field: Yes, and one by one came the girls, four girls before a boy. Then, as fate would have it, Eliot was, in a way--though he has grown up to be a fine manly man--he was in childhood more like a lovely doll than any of us. He was the only pure blonde in the family, and he had curly golden hair. When they had church festivals he used to be borrowed for tableaux of cupid. And all these things disgusted my father. He wanted him to be extremely rugged and masculine.

Fry: Yes, and he just wasn't born that way.

Field: So that was another disappointment. He would have liked boys, but heaven was more kind than to give him boys, for if he was as hard as he was on his girls, he was far more hard on Elliott.

Elliott was really the one who suffered under his determined domination. I remember the awful time with the white mice. Elliott had gathered some white mice for his little pets, and my father, finding it out, made him kill them one by one.

Fry: Did your father let you know that he wanted boys instead of girls?

Field: Not by obvious expression, no, but by a showing of disappointment my mother would feel every time she gave birth to another girl.

I want to say this, though, about my father. He must have broadened more than I realized in later years. You see, I left the house so soon--I was barely eighteen--and went away and from that time on saw very little of him, whereas my sister Mary used to see him sometimes in Chicago. And there she said, to her astonishment, he'd order wine at dinner. So at least he had grown that much. I think my mother had been a puritanical influence on him because of her hatred of the memories of her brother having been alcoholic, and had forbidden any kind of liquor in the house, and also as he was her ideal he was never supposed to smoke. But every now and then we could catch a little savor of a good cigar somewhere around his coat.

Fry: Oh really? So he was rebelling just a teeny bit against some of these things?

Field: Yes, he was. Perhaps that's what life is, in order to make us--well, a little more alive, a constant conflict with somebody or something.

Fry: Always giving and taking. I was wondering, when Tom and his wife Martha would come to visit you, how did your father seem to behave toward Tom? Did he have any resentment against him for not being able to go on into his own architectural training?

Field: Not that I ever saw. If he did have it he would feel it was wicked and he would bury it, and would have a sense of guilt if he didn't bury it. That is the way I'd read his character. No, he was always very glad to see his brother. They seemed to be extremely fond of each other.

I remember one time when it looked as if my Uncle Albert were going to make a fortune--he didn't--by investment in silver mines out west--that "out west" that seemed so infinitely far from us. He came to our house and I remember his saying, "George, if this goes through, all my brothers shall share in it." And that was the way they were. But it didn't go through.

Fry: So there was warmth among them?

Field: Yes, there was. They were all warm except my father. It's very strange to remember it. I had an Uncle Arthur who was the head of what we would call PG&E now, in Columbus, Ohio. And he was one of the most humorous and playful and really

- Field: loving men--if he hadn't married a very strict Christian Scientist who didn't let him play very much, I think he would have been happier, but as it was he made the best of everything.
- Fry: Did they have children who were cousins for you?
- Field: No, they had no children.
- Fry: So your most important cousins, then, were Uncle Tom's children?
- Field: Yes, they were. All the rest--Uncle Henry's children were just remotely close, if you understand what I mean. We knew they were cousins, but we didn't see much of them. Then my Uncle Albert, whom I also loved very much, had only one child, a sickly girl.

Mother's Influence

- Fry: The other day you mentioned how in the evenings you would all go into the sitting room, and Mary would make her paper dolls, and Alice would embroider, and you would be the one who read aloud. Now, your father was left out of the picture, and I wondered if that was because he didn't join you or he was out of town when this occurred, or what did he do in the evenings with you?
- Field: My memories of those evenings in which we gathered with Mother around the so-called sitting room table was a memory of his not being there at all. So it must have been during those times when he was away in New Orleans, but I don't think my father had, as far as I know, any special attraction to literature. That was not what attracted him. I may be doing him wrong. He knew his Bible well, and heaven knows that is wonderful literature. But I don't know of any other deep loves in books that he had, whereas my mother would rather have been reading than doing anything on earth.
- Fry: Well, what did he do in his spare time or in the evenings?
- Field: Gardening. He gardened. He had an office in town to which he went. He had to transact a lot of business from there. Then he was really constantly on the road after the long time in which he'd go to New Orleans where Mother would once in awhile, when we grew older, go with him. He was often away making large

Field: sales where there was a great deal of money involved. He wasn't just a petty salesman, by any means.

I think that probably a larger part of our life was spent away from our father than with him.

Fry: I see. And yet through his domination of your mother his own values more or less pervaded the home?

Field: Oh, yes. And I think that if we had been nice little girls that just loved to go to church and behave properly and never disagreed with our parents he would have perhaps been able to show us more affection, because I remember one occasion of which I haven't thought before until now. And that was [when I was] about in my early teens, probably thirteen, just entering them. Either my parents thought I ought to be a member of the church and be baptized or I, with an emotional nature just waking up, thought so. The Sunday before I was to be baptized I can remember my father was home, and it's the only time I remember that he ever took me on his lap, and he said, "I want to know why you want to be baptized." And I said, "Oh, I want to be good." And then he held me quite close. It's the only memory I have of his ever doing so.

And he said, "Well, that is what we all want to be," and seemed satisfied that I had sufficient desire for him not to have to question me as to dogma or anything of that sort.

Fry: The church was a great influence in your home, as related in your autobiography.

Field: Oh, it was the very center of our home, the core of it. My mother had outwardly conformed and she was really inwardly, I think, a very deeply spiritual woman. I remember the look on her face when the choir would sing. We had what seemed to me as I now think back a very good choir, and when they would sing an anthem, "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass," or some beautiful psalm like that, I remember looking at her and seeing something in her face that made me think that she just must be in heaven.

Fry: Really enraptured.

Field: Yes. I think that that was her ability, you see, to adapt this inner light, and that she had been brought up to think was the only source of our health and our religion [and feel that it] was being satisfied in a way. She was letting it listen and through it feeling the things she had been brought

- Field: up to believe in. But she seemed to become very interested in the Baptist church, and of course all her [Quaker] friends came out there to Detroit to see a stranger, and all her [new] friends were made through the church. People went to church much more in those days, you know, than they do now.
- Fry: It was a community center.
- Field: Yes. You see, life was simpler. There weren't the lures that the auto has made. Someday when the history of this time is written up somebody will write just on the immense influence on social and religious life that the automobiles had, and on domestic life.
- Fry: And the political--
- Field: And the political.
- Fry: We might not have had women's suffrage without that automobile you rode in rolling across the country.
- Field: No! It's an immense subject because you see now--children would once perhaps have gathered, as we did, around the lamp and the fire to read. They have an engagement which is maybe twenty miles away, and they jump into their cars and can go to it. There was no such thing to be had in those days. Parties were fewer, at least for us who didn't move in the high social set. There wasn't much of that anyway in Detroit.
- Fry: No. Well then, this constant church-going that you speak of in your autobiography was certainly backed up by your mother. You never felt any hesitancy on her part at all toward--?
- Field: Not at all. Not at all. I think she in time became in her own way identified with the church life.
- Fry: I was wondering one thing here. Now you've mentioned the religious tolerance in your mother's background and an independence of thought was emphasized there, and religious belief and so forth. Then you yourself have evolved into this, too, although in your childhood you didn't have it. Did you feel any influence from her on this? Did her Quakerism show through at all to you? Or did you evolve this more or less independently after you left home?
- Field: Oh, I think that Mother's Quakerism showed through to us but children don't sit down and tabulate what the influences are in their lives. They just seep in, and I think we felt it

- Field: through what Mother was more than anything she said.
- Fry: It was sort of a day-to-day identification with her behavior, maybe.
- Field: Yes, it was more or less that. And I know that I would feel that I wanted to be like her.
- Fry: Yes. And exactly how was she, Sara? I mean, what was it like to live through a day with her? Was she very gentle and soft-spoken or was she a little harried by her household duties?
- Field: She was very harried. In times when my father's business was particularly successful she would have a maid. And oh boy, how maids were treated in those days, even by such a lovely person as my mother. They were just given cold rooms and a generally very unhappy environment, I would say. But other times when she was without a maid it was very hard on her. She was never a very strong woman, I would say, physically.
- And she was also one who had all the aspirations that have been so beautifully fulfilled in the modern woman but were not fulfilled in her day, and that is an outreach into learning and culture that went beyond the home. She was a member of one of the first women's clubs, called the Women's Historical Club, in Detroit. She, I think, if she had been honest, enjoyed it more than church. She loved it passionately, and of course if she didn't have a maid it was the house that suffered if she had something to prepare for the club or some book to read on the next subject they were going to consider.
- So I feel that Mother's influence was one such as I guess all parents' are. It was one of absorbing what a human being is. I know that I would never want to be like my father, which is saying that I reacted against his--well, if not against his principles and beliefs, certainly I reacted from the way he exercised them.
- Fry: Yes. Isn't it fortunate that children have such clear vision and they can see, it seems, what to reject and what to internalize in the parents?

Father as Breadwinner

- Field: Indeed it is. And you know, in speaking as I do I feel I do

Field: an injustice to my father because I keep speaking of those elements in him which were difficult for us. But there were other elements which I hope that we inherited somewhat, too. And that is courage. He had great courage in the face of so much frustration and so large a family to educate and rear. I never heard him complain. Just once in my life, and this again was something that was half mystery and half terror. I heard him groan in a room where he was ill because evidently he had just had word, as I learned long afterwards, that a furniture business into which he had been putting his savings in the hope of getting free from the position he was in had failed entirely and he lost everything, all his life savings.

I think that was one reason we lived so frugally. He was trying to save for an independent life, not to have to travel so much.

Fry: And then he had lost it all?

Field: Yes, we never knew this until later because never was a word spoken to us children about finances except to say that we couldn't afford this or we couldn't afford that. And indeed I must say that we were less demanding than children are--a treat of some candy or other things of that sort was rare and very much more appreciated. Ice cream was considered a great luxury then. And there was a dessert called charlotte russe, I remember, that my small being craved very much, which was once in a great while served.

But, you see, everything in life was more frugal anyway, except perhaps for a very, very few people.

Fry: Yes, and as you say you didn't have the vast array of things to tempt you all the time because transportation hadn't been developed to the point it is now.

Field: No, no.

Fry: Speaking of transportation, didn't you say that you had seen this first car coming down the street in Detroit?

Field: Yes, I did. I saw the first Model-T come down Woodward Avenue.

Fry: Do you think that was Charles B. King's car? Oh, this was a Model-T Ford.

Field: Yes.

Fry: Oh, it was? I see. Well, I had read in Arthur Pound's book

Fry: that in 1894--that would be about when you were twelve years old-- Charles B. King, who built marine engines, drove the first car through Detroit streets, and people came out from everywhere to see it go putt-ing down. I wonder if that could have been--

Field: Oh, it may have been that car because this was supposed to have been the first one, but in later years I read nothing about names of--

Fry: You didn't know--?

Field: No. I was told in later years that that was the first Ford that had--you know, I mean someone who perhaps just had slight knowledge of it, mentioned it. But I'm quite sure it was the first car. You see, we didn't live very far from Woodward Avenue; Charlotte was a street that came off of Woodward Avenue. And we lived a few blocks from it. It was nothing to walk over there. And so we evidently heard that this contraption was going to go down the street, and went over. I can remember yet the horrible smell it made. It fairly bellowed noise and smell all at the same time. And my father's complete disgust with it. He said, "That thing will never work. Imagine anyone substituting live, beautiful horses for that horrible thing." Little did he know how the wave of the future was started that day.

Fry: Did he ever have a car in his later years?

Field: No, he never owned one.

Fry: Let's see if there's anything else on Detroit.

Field: He died in 1916, I think it was. Most of that time, you see, he was still, alas, travelling. One of the most pathetic things about his life--I thought about it when I read Camus the other day, the book about The Stranger. Not that my father was so commonplace a little man as that, but that his life ended in tragedy whereas it should have gone out in peace and quiet because that was the way that he lived.

He had made an immense sale on which he would have received a very large commission, probably large enough to have retired at that time because there was only Mother with him. On the way home, he--who, with all this fanaticism and severity that I describe, was a gourmet just the same and knew good food--on the train he ordered some caviar. Whether it was that or not that gave him the attack from which he died, he had an attack of acute indigestion which made gas press up against the heart and he died early in the morning after his arrival

Field: that night, after a dreadful night in the hotel. I always feel that that was a tragic ending to a life that had so much frustration.

I feel infinite compassion for him, although I regret not having known a real father. I was always making a dream father to compensate.

Fry: Now was this at school or was it in your play at home also?

Field: No, I think it was more at school. I evidently had a humble creative power because my teachers always seemed to think my essays were something to be kept. I remember writing these--perfectly absurd from the point of view of reality--descriptions of my father. And he was always the companion and generous and loving, understanding person. It was, of course, just a child taking out all its wishful thinking.

Fry: A real yearning there, but you weren't fooling yourself at all?

Field: Not at all. But of course I think in all these things you have to realize that children are not obvious about their reactions. I did not say, "Go to, now, I will write about an ideal father because I haven't one." I just dreamed this kind of a father, and immediately within the imagination that was always alive, wished it, as it were, on him. But children do these things without any objectivity about it. They're always subjective.

Siblings

Fry: You and Mary also had some highly imaginative--

Field: Yes, she has also in her own way created. I think had she had the self-discipline to channel her gifts more instead of dispersing them as she did, she would have really achieved quite a name in prose literature. She wrote some excellent stories, some of which were published in good magazines in early days, and generally she had been looked upon as the gifted one of the family. But I'm sorry to say, when she had the chance at one time to stay in New York and do nothing but write, she just couldn't separate herself from all the excitements that were going on in New York.

Fry: Oh really? How was she given this chance?

Field: Darrow believed in her so much, in her head, that he said he'd

Field: stake her for a whole year.

Fry: Is that right!

Field: On a modest amount, and she and Madge Jenrersen, who isn't a famous writer, but a very good one, shared a little apartment. Madge, who was a kind of what you might say, definite person, who could make herself do anything she set her mind to do, wrote several biographies--I can't think what they were--one was on [James Jerome] Hill, the great railroad man. And she wrote some very good stories that were shaped well. They were never works of genius but they were all good. But she just restricted herself to certain hours of the day when nothing could interfere.

Mary would try to do that but then Maude Adams the actress would come to town, and there would be a luncheon for writers to meet Maude Adams, and Mary would go. And she was elected a member of the Heterodoxy Club in New York. Brilliant women, they were just all wonderful. They were all artists or professional women, women of distinction. She was a member of that and would go to their meetings. And of course, at those meetings someone would ask her to come to luncheon. And her time got all broken up and she didn't ever achieve very much.

Fry: You seem to think that she really had a great gift, that even as a child--

Field: Oh, and she had a great influence on my life. I think she helped in my liberation more than anybody else. I want to pay that tribute to her. I wish I could tell you how often she tried to protect me as a child from my father's severity.

I remember once--have I told you about the potato incident?

Fry: No.

Field: Well, I had a very small stomach, evidently, and never could eat very much at a time, and here I was confronted, on my plate, with a big boiled potato, and with a natural spontaneity, I said, "Oh my, I couldn't eat all that potato."

And my father said, "You will eat everything that is on your plate." And Mary, who saw the tears beginning to come because I was easily affected, said, "Never mind, Sara. Pretty soon you'll be grown up and you can do as you please." For that she was sent immediately into her room and kept on bread and water for two days, like a prisoner.

Fry: Oh, no! Well, did you and Mary ever get to intercede for each other or to slip around somehow and lessen the hurt of the predicament?

Field: Of course, the way then that I would try to lessen the hurt of punishment was, I kept slipping any dainties or delicacies to her in her room. We did try to help each other, yes.

She was also tyrannous with me, and in later life--I have to say it--she had become so possessive of me that I had to break away from that.

Fry: By later life, do you mean later childhood?

Field: No, in later young womanhood. You see, she would really prefer to be with friends her own age when we were growing up, but I was always the substitute when there wasn't any one of those around, and I'd read to her while she made her paper dolls, not only in the evening but at other times. I'd just be her little slave that way, and then some girl friend of her own age--let's say, when she was around fifteen, you know, fourteen, fifteen--would come in and she'd say, "Now, go on Sara, go on, go on out." So that I just came and went at her beck and call. And it grew into a kind of sense of possessiveness that became extremely difficult to deal with in later years.

Fry: Did she move to the West Coast when you did, or soon after? I was trying to get your lives together again later on.

Field: Yes. She never came when I was in Portland. But after I left my Portland home and came down on my own to San Francisco she very soon came to San Francisco to live because she had met Lemuel Parton, a fine journalist. He was on the Examiner here and of course she lived in San Francisco with him. That was one of the difficult times for me.

Fry: You and Mary produced a lot of puppet plays with her paper dolls, didn't you?

Field: Oh, yes indeed, we did. We would put a table in a closet so it would be dark enough. Then we'd have some--I don't know what we did for footlights--but there was a cloth that hung down that didn't let the operations that went on under the table be seen. And she would operate these paper dolls like puppets or in a little drama. Sometimes I'd write a little drama for them.

Fry: Oh, you would?

Field: Oh, you can imagine--

Fry: It was probably completely delightful, though, with all sorts of childish--

Field: We had a good imaginative type of recreation. We didn't depend on gadgets and things as children do today so much. We really had to find our happiness creatively.

Fry: You had to create it yourself.

Then you and Mary seemed to share other kinds of experiences, too, even though you were four years apart, such as the morning you decided to get up early and-- Did you feel any sense of sharing in your sensitivity to the beauties of nature and things like that?

Field: No. I can't remember any definite impressions of that kind. I presume we did. We loved to be outdoors, and we had a fine expanse of, you might say, playground in those days before Detroit began to be so built up. We had a nice playhouse in this home to which we moved quite early in my life, on Charlotte Avenue. It had an arbor that ran for quite a little length, and somehow that arbor and the vines growing over it, and the fact that the fence that was on one side between us and the next property at the back was overhung by an apple tree which was very beautiful in the spring as all apple trees are, and tempting when the apples came because there were some that we could reach. All those things had magic for me in them. I really felt the magic of the world in a very keen and comforting way.

That morning you speak of when we got up early was probably shared with Mary, although I think that maybe when the time came she just didn't get up, for I don't remember her presence. I remember being alone with all that wonder of early morning. And I remember doing the forbidden thing of taking off my shoes and stockings and walking in the dewy grass, a delicious sensation. Later under some formula of some doctor it became a fad to do it. They thought it had healing power in it.

I remember when we lived in Cleveland years after, hearing that Mr. Rockefeller, Senior, used to get up early in the morning and do this because he was told it would be good for something or other.

Fry: Oh, really? You were way ahead of your times.

Field: What healing it did for me was of another kind.

Fry: It didn't come through the soles of your feet, especially.

Field: It was wonderful.

Church Attendance

Fry: I wonder if you would like to describe any more of the influence of the church on your life?

Field: Well, all by myself I had learned to play the piano in a way. It must have been horrible. I had learned to be able to play hymns, and I think that the happy exhibitionism of being able to be asked at the Junior Society meetings to play the piano for the hymns was a great attraction, when one is honest with oneself. [Laughter] I think that undoubtedly the church must have meant more to me than it seems to now as I look back and feel how far from what it stood for I have come. So I don't know how to talk about it except to say that we went constantly. There was a ten o'clock service on Sunday morning. Then we came home and had of course the usual Sunday dinner with a roast always, and usually company. My mother, in her sweet, generous way, always brought home one or two of the lonely people, usually old maids that were appealing to her heart, and sometimes there would be missionaries that had been talking at the service, and we'd entertain them. I listened to stories about China and Japan in that way, and had that early touch with the Orient.

Then after dinner almost immediately there came what was called this Junior Society, the young people, you know. And then after that came the evening service to which we were all supposed to go. Sunday was just crowded with those things. There weren't any weekend excursions like young people have nowadays because on Sunday nobody could possibly neglect church.

And I don't remember resenting going to church any time too much except on Thanksgiving morning. That always seemed to me outrageous, that we had to, because usually it used to be the time of the first perhaps good snowfall, and we liked to be out with our sleds and having some fun. Then I remember thinking that I didn't want to go but we had to go to Thanksgiving service, and then we came home to the turkey.

Fry: Oh yes, but this was a sort of extra that really didn't need to be put into your weekly calendar at that time.

Field: No, I think our life was very typical of the average child's life, with, of course, variations due to their parents' temperaments and characters, of that period. It was a world that centered a great deal around the church and the home, and the rare times of picnics which we would have at Belle Isle, the Sunday School picnics, and sometimes a family picnic, but not often. It emphasized, I would say, a far more serious kind of living than is done today, and certainly much less cluttered living. Life wasn't broken up into so many facets as it is now. It had clearer sides to it and perhaps deeper ones.

Search for a Father Figure

Field: And yet on the whole I feel that if it hadn't been for my mother that my memories of childhood would be very much sadder than perhaps most children because of my sensitive nature, which was too sensitive, and my father's effect on me. I think that that was to be a great influence in all my relationships of my later life. It's very interesting how I've always preferred older men.

Fry: You were always hunting for a--

Field: A father.

Fry: A father. And you found one.

Field: Yes, plus, though--

Fry: Really, this would be a good time to ask this: was there really much father-daughter relationship between you and the Colonel or was it actually--?

Field: I'll say again, only in the sense of the loving protection with a complete ability to tell one's whole self to another.

Fry: Complete honesty in a soul-to-soul relationship.

Field: Yes, and a great tenderness. But we were first of all lovers, with this background to it. But I was just thinking how even at school I preferred the young professors in high school that would come to--although the boys liked me all right in my class--and I always preferred them. And then the two marriages I made were with men older than myself. There's some significance to that, I think, because like all girls of that time when perhaps

Field: men were more abundant, I had plenty of other chances to marry men of my age. I always liked the older men.

Fry: Well, Sara, was it this idea of a benevolent protector, sort of, that you missed? Was this the part of fatherhood that you were hunting for, do you think? I know this is a pretty difficult question.

Field: I didn't think about that, dear. I think--no, it wasn't that I was hunting for that. I had security as far as material things go with my father. I mean always we had good food and sufficient clothing, house, and everything of that sort. Nothing of that sort was felt, no pinch of poverty, although frugality, yes.

But it was, I think, that I wanted an element of companionship in my father, an element of approach which I never found, to feel oneself absolutely free with someone, absolutely understanding with someone wise and kind and good. I'm sure it was an element in my other relationships. But I never would want that too confused with my relationship with the Colonel.

Fry: Primarily, was it very much on a level with each other?

Field: Yes.

Mary Field

Fry: In your relationship with Mary did you have any feeling that you were free to confide in her?

Field: Oh, yes. We used to confide in each other. We had all kinds of secrets together. Sometimes her secrets were a little dark, when she made me plant my pennies and told me it would grow into a tree. [Inaudible] These were in the years, you can see, of my almost imbecile childhood. They wouldn't grow and I would water them, and wait for a sprout and nothing came. Then I'd dig in and there was no penny there. I would be told that I hadn't taken good enough care of it, that it probably had just sunk into the earth. It had sunk into Mary's pocket, that's where it had gone! [Laughter]

Fry: In later years, did this give you a feeling of hesitancy about using her as a close confidante or anything, or did you really trust her?

Field: I trusted her greatly up to a certain time in life.

Fry: At least all through your childhood at home?

Field: Yes. I hate to say this, but it's the truth: that she was definitely jealous of my relationship with the Colonel, not with regard to her relationship to him in any way, but because it took me away from her and that made very great difficulty. Then, of course, there wasn't, there couldn't be the confidence and trust.

Fry: Yes, this is almost like the story of--

Field: And she knows it now in her late years and is sorry about it, but it was true.

Fry: She couldn't see it at that time at all?

Field: No, I think Mary's sense of possessiveness of anyone, of a husband, a child (that's what makes it hard for [her daughter] Margaret today), of a friend, sister, was almost pathological. She just wants to confine that person to herself. And yet she would want her own perfect liberty to do anything she wanted. She simply wanted the person--I think she's struggled in her late years to overcome it--but she did want that person to always be on hand and free to do her will.

Fry: Sort of like she was for her father, I guess, was it?

Field: Yes, she was my father's favorite child, by the way.

Fry: I thought maybe this had been the main relationship she knew in her childhood. Maybe that isn't right. I mean the idea of her always having to be on hand and at her father's beck and call. Is this the same general pattern that her relationships have taken then with other people?

Field: Well, I think so, to a degree. That doesn't exactly describe it, but it approaches it, yes.

Fry: I was wondering if there was just a nice simple similarity there between her relationship with her father and her relationship with everybody else, but maybe not. Well, I think we've covered all your family.

Field: I think we have.

[end of interview]

III CHILD TO WOMAN: STIRRINGS OF INDEPENDENCE

[February 1, 1960]

Adolescence

- Fry: Shall I ask you the beginning question? As you grew into adolescence were you aware of the aspects of adolescence at that time; were people in general in the culture aware of this?
- Field: I would say not at all, and certainly not in our family. I don't ever remember hearing the word "adolescence" used. I was just growing up and that was all that was noticed. I think the study and realization of adolescence came many years later.
- Fry: With the advent of Freud?
- Field: Undoubtedly with the penetration of Freudian doctrine. I simply now, looking back, and with I hope a little more wisdom, see some signs of adolescence. I remember my mother telling me very timidly that I was approaching an age when I would menstruate, and when I asked what that meant and she explained it I found myself looking forward with rather real excitement to this bloody event. And when it came--I don't know whether you should write this or not, it ought to come in, it comes soon after--I got excited about it and felt that I was older. But she never explained in any way its relation to birth or reproduction in general or any of those things, so we were just left to think it was a phenomenon of growing up. And it didn't have any significant meaning to it for us.

I think it's very hard for people today to realize what utter ignorance the girls who were well brought up, as they were called, the girls of my day, were led to. I remember speculating in what

Field: I now can see was adolescence with my schoolmates as to how babies came. The most fantastic ideas were advanced. One which I remember well was that the mother at a certain period accumulated a jelly which came out in a great blob molded into shape by the doctor--because we observed there was usually a doctor around about the time a new baby came. [That we could entertain] such fantastic ideas probably seems utterly impossible to believe today, but the reason it can't be believed by people is because they don't know what an age of darkness it was for the young person or girl.

Fry: You really grew up in this ignorance?

Field: In real ignorance of what was going on. That is why we were attracted or repelled. I remember in my eighth grade at school just before going to high school when I was still under fourteen, having a male teacher who used to put his arm around me at the blackboard when several girls were there working out a problem. And I was so repelled by him that I would always try to get a position close in between two other girls so that this couldn't happen.

But on the other hand, there were the attractions which I began to see were arising. There was a very romantically named boy who lived across the street from me named Forest Lancaster, and I used to think just to walk home behind him was an exciting occurrence, and he didn't even know I existed except to say "Hello" or "Goodbye," because he was usually walking with some other of his classmates. And I even remember the glow I would feel at having walked home behind him.

Later in my adolescence, as it is now called, I remember something also very significant in showing the instinct that a woman has even in her earliest phases of womanhood about men. I used to ride on a bicycle to school with a boy named Chandler Post. It was purely a mental friendship. We both liked the same books. We both were reading Thackeray, and we discussed Vanity Fair. We were very fond of Notre Dame and all such books. Also there was a competition between Chandler and me in the Latin class. He had an absolutely phenomenal memory for vocabulary, and I used to study hard to try to beat him. When we got to the Iliad, my interest in the Iliad was not in the factual part of it, it was in the drama, the love story, the literature--by that time I'd gotten enough Latin that I could really appreciate it. But Chandler would always beat me on the facts.

Later he became a professor at Harvard, the only one who

Field: was ever allowed to teach in two different departments. He taught in both the classics and art history. And they tell me his students writing art history themes were always bedeviled beyond endurance by his insistence on dates. He knew thousands of dates and expected them to know them.

But the point is that he was an ascetic. Whether he'd be what we call a "fairy" today or not I don't know. I only know that I sensed in him someone I could trust. It's so hard to put things into words about that time because you didn't. You just felt them. It was felt thought.

Fry: You didn't have the words?

Field: No, we didn't have the words. But I do think it's interesting, that friendship for me on this basis because I instinctively felt something in him that would make it impossible for him ever to make love to a girl.

Fry: So you didn't have to worry.

Field: I know, and I enjoyed being a young intellectual.

Fry: That's interesting to me. You both influenced each other, so that in later years--

Field: I don't think I influenced him very much. When my daughter went to Radcliffe, she took a course in art history under him and had a horrible time. She was married at that time and she was getting her master's degree. She was married and [her husband] James Caldwell was getting his Ph.D., or doctorate. And he came down to their house for dinner and he said, "You know, Kay, I might have been your father," showing that he himself didn't know what his own ascetic instincts were, but I've often thought about how he could still say a thing like that and feel that he'd made a choice, whereas he was by nature either an ascetic or something else. It might be otherwise.

Fry: Yes, because your relationship was entirely through the vehicle of ideas.

Field: Of ideas. And in competition. He always beat me, though.
[Laughter]

Sexual Ignorance

- Fry: I was going to ask you--and if I'm changing the subject you just wave a red flag at me--a while ago you were telling about your mother taking you aside and telling you about menstruation. When she told you these things could you tell what her attitude was?
- Field: She was so timid about it that it left the feeling of hush-hush that surrounded anything that had to do with the body, and especially sex. Then of course, she knowing its relation to sex, but not telling me any more than she had to to warn me left me feeling that there was something a little to be ashamed of about it although it excited me. I think she wanted to tell all of us girls ahead of time because she had an older sister who had been terrified by the approach of menstruation at a boarding school she was sent to without knowing about it, and she rushed through the dormitory screaming, "Someone's been here in the night and tried to murder me!" And it frightened all the girls.
- Fry: So your mother felt she had to at least tell you this much?
- Field: Certainly. I think that left a mark on her mind, so that Mother wanted to explain at least that much to us.
- Fry: Was anything else ever explained to you?
- Field: Nothing. When I was married I still didn't fully know. I had suspicions that there had to be something to get a baby between a man and a woman, but I didn't know exactly what the relationship was. She thrust into my hands as I was leaving on my honeymoon a book called Physical Life of a Woman. It was hardly the time to read it. [Laughter]
- Fry: This was at a time when you were supposed to have been able to write the book.
- Field: Yes, it certainly was.
- Fry: Oh well, that is pathetic, though.
- Field: No preparation, as in the Orient, where it is so early. The maturing process there is further along; they certainly are prepared to know all about it.
- Fry: The whole idea then of just growing into maturity was pretty

Fry: much left to chance and growing like Topsy?

Field: Yes, it was. I think it must have led to many unhappy marriages, as it did in my case. I don't mean that that was the whole thing, because I married again. Finally, of course, my first husband and I were utterly non-simpatico.

But I do think that if one looked or could know more about the marriage relation, there wouldn't be the separations that I happen to know were in the group that I went with.

Fry: It certainly didn't make sex a positive force in marriage for the woman.

Field: No.

Religious Beliefs and Questions

Fry: Would you like to go into how, although you continued going to church a great deal and so forth, this seemed to be having less influence on you at this time.

Field: I presume that after that first emotional outburst that may have preceded adolescence, when I wanted to give my heart to Christ and listened to an evangelist who was very persuasive and very gentle with everyone who came to have private conferences with him, I presume that that was an early adolescent evidence. But as I grew in my later teens, let's say sixteen, seventeen, my emotional interest becoming of course more centered in the personal relations such as liking men, the men that I did like, took me away from the church. I didn't find that emotional outlet. Now many adolescent girls I think did find religion an adolescent outlet, but I don't remember that it continued with me. I think it began as such. Then when I began getting disillusioned I didn't like to go to all these many services that we were even required to go to as children, and which I hadn't minded so much then because that was one of the key ways you had of meeting your age group, and Sunday School, and the Junior Society and all that. They were all right in their place. But I remember it getting finally very boring.

Fry: What sort of competition did the church run into for older children? I was wondering what else was available to them in the community at that time for you to find activities with other

Fry: peers.

Field: Very little where religion was concerned, where religious parents were concerned.

Fry: I mean other secular things.

Field: That's just what I was going to say, too, that the fun you got out of secular life was very limited by the religious beliefs of your parents. For instance, they didn't believe in playing cards or dancing. We were never given dancing lessons. How I ever picked up dancing--I must have danced with girls sometimes at their houses, with my girl friends, because I remember that people went to the graduating party of the high school--that people would dance pretty well with girls [laughter]. But I had very little of that kind of thing. Social life was simpler, for one thing when we gave parties, we went to parties or we had parties at the house. It was games, mostly, and we had a lot of fun. It would be so absurd for the modern young people to find fun in the things we did.

Fry: I was wondering if you could describe just one game?

Field: Well, I remember what we called "Musical Chairs," and of course there's a good deal of adolescent excitement in that because the one that lost the chair, if it was a girl, had to be kissed by a boy.

Fry: This is even better than dancing. [Laughter]

Field: But it all seems so simple now as I look back on it.

Fry: That's interesting. Well, as you continued this same schedule of going to church almost from sunup to sundown on Sundays, and I suppose you had some church doings through the week too?

Fry: Well, we were excused in high school, because we had homework to do, from going to the Wednesday night prayer meeting, which was the only other church activity, I remember, as a regular thing--of course there were special things, but as a regular thing. The only time we were excited to go was when something that we knew was very secret was going on; it was after the prayer meeting proper was over, only the adults stayed and the doors were closed and the rest of us huddled outside whispering and wondering what was going on, because it was vaguely known that some young woman of the church was going to have a baby. And it was true, it [the father] was the man she was going to marry, but for some reason they hadn't waited. This was hush-hush again, of course,

Field: but we gradually would find out little bits about it. But that's the only time I can remember being excited about going to church.

Fry: This was its only real contribution. [Laughter]

Field: Its only real contribution, yes. But also I really think I was beginning to question the more austere and hard and fast of the doctrines of the Baptist Church.

I remember in my second year of high school a young physics professor who used to come to see me, and we [would] decorously play croquet or take a walk, and we would talk about religious subjects. As I look back now, [he was] quite a liberal, very much more free; naturally he was an older young man. But instead of being shocked as I would have been if I was still very religious I was quite sympathetic with what he said and I think I often agreed with him. But that is also rather indistinct in my mind--as to what the conversations were at that time.

Fry: But you did continue to have these conversations, so apparently you didn't tell him never to darken your door again?

Field: Never. No, I didn't dare. What's more, from the fear that he would be told that by my father, I never told my father anything of what we talked about.

Fry: So you were beginning to get a few independent thoughts?

The Dream of an Ideal Father

Field: Yes. Also I think that in this period I missed the relationship with a father more than at any other time because the dream life began a lot to center around an ideal father. I don't know if I told about that in the earlier childhood.

Fry: You mentioned writing themes about fathers.

Field: Yes, well, it should have come in this period when I was in high school. I would write themes on the ideal father and I would tell tall tales about my father which were all just wishful thinking. I have a feeling this came in the adolescent period when a father could mean so much to the child and the direction of its future. A good relation with the father I think would determine so much as to the kind of man she would like and be interested in later.

- Fry: So you simply had to bring up your own ideal there?
- Field: Yes. Not that my father wasn't a good man, as the world knows him. He was simply unable to cheer himself up whenever he was really himself with his children. My youngest sister tells me that later on when I had gone and left home she went back to visit my mother for a while before her marriage and that he was quite changed, that he softened.
- Fry: Oh, he had?
- Field: It was too late for me. I had already left.
- Fry: What sort of father did you portray for yourself?
- Field: Well, it was just what he wasn't, that is a companion to his children. This father went on long European trips and brought back wonderful presents to us all. And we could confide in him with all our hearts.
- Fry: Yes, the real child-centered father.

The Memorable Woman of Huronia Beach

What other people influenced you especially during this period?
You mentioned a woman?

- Field: Yes, that's a very strange thing in my life because I can't now remember her name, and it shows how unimportant the name is and how very important the personality is. It was at Huronia Beach, where my father had accompanied us for the summer, and this woman had a cottage there too. She was a married woman with children. As I look back I see now that she must have been a very natural feminist, although I can't remember her talking to me about the doctrines of feminism. But she would sit and smoke with her husband. At Huronia Beach, it was considered all beyond the pale. And she said, "Well, why shouldn't I? He likes company when he's smoking, and I like smoking with him." So she did.

And she was very influential in giving me the impression of a person who was not an echo of the man with whom she was married but was a human being in her own right. I was just a young girl, just entering my teens, and I out of nervousness bit my fingernails. She said to me, "Do you want me to help you

Field: to stop that?"

And I said, "Yes, but I don't know why I do it."

And she said, "I know why you do it, because you haven't realized that you are a person in yourself no matter how frightened you are of your father. I've noticed you are afraid of your father."

And I said, "Yes, I am."

And she said, "Now you try every time you get nervous over this to just say, 'I'm a person, myself, apart from my father.' That's really on the mind side." She said, "Now I'll tell you something on the practical side. You bite them because you get a little hang nail and then you keep working at it. I'm going to give you a little manicure set and I'm going to show you how to use it."

And I began to really improve this bad habit, from that time on. But [I had] the strong sense of having come up against someone who was different.

My aunt, whom I loved very much, my mother's younger sister who was a kindergarten teacher, came up to visit us [at Huronia Beach]. She was married by this time, and she was very much afraid to have her husband go bathing in the lake. And this lady was so outraged. She said, "Why, if he wants to go, are you going to let your fears interfere? It isn't his fear." He had no fear. And she said, "Look here, Mrs. Nichols, more men die in bed than anywhere else. Do you let him go to bed at night?" [Laughter] It was such a small remark. It sounds unimportant when repeated. But it was very important to a girl who had no idea that a woman could speak up like this.

Fry: Yes, and in a paternalistic country.

Field: Here was a woman who was a person in her own right regardless of anybody else and that's what she wanted everybody else to be, of course. I remember she said to me that day--she talked to me about my fear of my father. She said, "You know, you can't imagine how bad it is for a person to feel that anybody else could hurt them inside. Your father can't hurt you inside. You're a person. And that's there."

Fry: Was she quite a person?

Field: Yes. I can't remember her name, but all this that she was and said is so distinct in my memory. It came to me in a flood, by

Field: the way, when I got to thinking about this just now. How many years has it been?

Fry: Can you in any way define the connection between her and your actual work in women's suffrage?

Field: No, I can't. Those things are too unrelated in the memory. I don't think they're unrelated at all in the deeper substance. I think probably the effect of her personality was a strong influence in anything I did that was, you might say, liberation for women. I wanted to help liberate in any way possible.

Fry: Would you say she really helped in this beginning process of liberating yourself, Sara?

Field: I think she did. I think she did because, you see, it wasn't too many years later that I really rebelled against the confinement of my home and married the first man that asked me to marry him.

Fry: And this was the little germ here?

Field: Yes, I think it was. Or perhaps it was only imprinted. We don't know. The soul comes into the body, and we don't know what its contents are in the early stages. It may have been that the Quaker ancestry of mine, which was full of rebellion, had some of the genes that came in there. But why did I respond to it though? My mother was shocked by it. She was quite shocked by it but I felt a kinship with her [the woman of Huronia Beach].

Beginnings of Intellectual Independence

Fry: There was something in it that was very effective, at any rate, at that time. So we have here too your young physics professor who helped you define your own questions about the orthodoxy of the Baptist teaching.

Field: Yes, and [he] also pointed out for me early that no one could go into science--this was quite interesting on his part because science, of course, hadn't advanced [very far], but he pointed out to me that no one could study science without questioning the blind beliefs that religion insisted on.

Fry: This anticipated the furor that came later, with Clarence Darrow and the Scopes trial. Then this lady at Huronia Beach who more or less helped you see yourself as an individual and

- Fry: to feel that there was nothing wrong with being one.
- Field: I don't know that I took it all in then, but I was certainly arrested enough to view it at this late age in my life as an alive thing. And to have met her at that time undoubtedly made some deeper impression, one to catch later.
- Fry: Would you be able to say that then since you were able and had the capacity to have an intellectual approach to things in general, this was a kind of a beginning of a search for you perhaps? I was wondering what other influences you can remember, or trends that started at this time in the field of your intellectual development.
- Field: Well, I'm afraid I can't.
- Fry: What books were you reading?
- Field: I was reading everything I could lay my hands on, sort of a medley, but I will say to a large extent good, basic, solid reading. I passionately fell in love with Victor Hugo. As I say, I discussed The Hunchback of Notre Dame with Chandler Post, and we differed greatly on our interpretations, [his and] my interpretation of it. And [in Vanity Fair] I also felt sorry where everybody in the family thought I should condemn Becky Sharp, but I really felt sorry for her.
- Fry: Oh, you did? And how did your argument go about Becky?
- Field: She struggled for what she wanted in life and then got a pretty bad deal in the end, and it seemed to me that that wasn't fair.
- Fry: So you saw Thackeray's real pathos there.
- Field: Yes I did, yes I did.
- Fry: What other new ideas were emerging?
- Field: Well, I was going to speak of--my mother was very fond of George Eliot, and of course you know the education that a family like ours got because of the absence of easy transportation such as there is now. Young people can just go off to some very flimsy kind of entertainment. Anyway, there isn't the cohesion now that there was then. A family group would gather around a reading lamp, table, and I remember we started in reading George Eliot and went right through her one winter. One of my deep impressions is my emotional feeling about Mother's refusal to say much about her own marriage, which in general

Field: people would have called a happy one, but that was very superficial because she had deep sorrow from encountering elements in my father's nature. And I said to her when I had read Daniel Deronda, why was that her favorite book? And she said it was because [it] covered all the [sorrows] that she felt she didn't wish the world [to know], but she drew a veil between that. I knew there that this was an ideal and I was quite shaken by it. I thought, "Well, that was just too bad. You may not want the world to know, but surely there ought to be some way of resolving those sorrows other than nursing them in your own breast." It was such things as that that made an impression and also gave us our emotional outlet. We got it through books, through others, through characters in these books.

I remember when Mother didn't want us to read Adam Bede, and I would answer, "But Mother, that's absurd. I read in an article that it's considered George Eliot's greatest." Well, she thought we still had other great ones we could read, you see. I think now it was because there was a definite relationship. She didn't want to explain these things.

Fry: You mentioned too having a discussion with your mother when you discovered that George Eliot was a woman and not a man.

Field: Oh yes. I think I may have mentioned it, or [I] may have spoken to you about Jane Austen. It was Jane Austen. In the first place, of course, Jane Austen's amazing concentration that let her write all those fine novels, right in the room where the whole family were gathered because, as Virginia Woolf put it, she had no room of her own. The second thing was that she had covered up [her writing] with her apron every time visitors came in because the family was so ashamed of having a writer there in the family. It seemed to me too outrageous for words. [Inaudible] had to do the same thing.

Fry: Oh, really?

Field: All because she wrote, yes; she had to put an apron over her works. And all these efforts of a woman at emancipation gripped my imagination, my heart and my mind very quickly.

Of course, in the emotional stages of adolescence needing all the [inaudible] was a time to fix it very quickly.

Fry: Yes. So, like we were talking about at lunch, that when a woman was creative and productive in ways other than childbearing she had to cover it up and play the role of the subjugated partner to her superior spouse?

Field: Yes. Who shows it better than Jane Austen?

Fry: But you felt the injustice of this?

Field: Indeed I did, and a kind of an inner anger about this because I wanted to go back to the times and snatch that apron off and say, "Your writing is wonderful. Don't be ashamed of it!"

This was the echo of my friend that I met in early adolescence there at Huronia Beach. I would have been very happy to have known any influence of hers that helped me in the years I worked hard to emancipate women.

Exposure to Literature

Fry: Would you like to just give us a sort of running description of other people that you read at that time whom you liked?

Field: Well, of course, we read the novels of our time, but in a strange way they haven't stayed in my mind. This shows how the classics stick better. We read, of course, some Mark Twain. And for comedy purposes we read Innocents Abroad, [inaudible] observe [inaudible] which came into our life.

And my mother took the good magazines. We had a system in those days of cooperative reading of magazines. It was in a regular organization in which one family had, let's say, the Century magazine for a certain time, and then it was taken and sent to another. I mean it was an organization that did it. We paid dues, but instead of taking them all as people have to now, and not read them very much, we just had to read them quickly and get a good deal out of them, and we pored through the good articles of the Century, the Atlantic Monthly, and the Ladies' Home Journal, which was in existence then. So I think we had a very rich literary life.

Fry: Through this cooperative you had access to all these other magazines.

Field: And this is all in the adolescent years; you see how much formative influence was at hand. We admired characters with more feeling.

Fry: Yes, and yet something a little higher than Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse.

Field: Yes, I should say so. I really think that--there was a poverty there, too, of course--but I think on the whole we had more riches than the child of today.

Fry: It seems that way. And you did so much of your things right in the family. Even in adolescence you still were very much of a family. What kind of poetry did you read?

Field: Well, the poetry that we read was what would be called lower grade now, and this was the one deficiency that I feel in the rather rich literary life that we had. My mother loved Tennyson and she loved the simple things of Longfellow, Whittier, and poets of that kind. And the poems I learned were all from those poets. I think the most important influence really was in what you might say a negative way in reading Tennyson's Idylls of the King. I was so furious at Guinevere for groveling at the feet of Arthur because in the purity of the young adolescent girl's mind, love is exalted. She doesn't know, or I didn't know, about the full import of the sex relationship. But she worships love. It means something very great and wonderful. I felt the love between Guinevere and Lancelot was very beautiful, and even though it wasn't right, as Mother said, for her to be unfaithful to Arthur, at least she was unfaithful for something more true than faithfulness as the queen. Her final groveling in the street just disturbed me. I had no great love for her to do that, and I thought the same way about Enid when her husband put her through all those many trials to try her faithfulness. All this seemed to me a desperation, something I really didn't know what it was but that stood like kind of an angel invisible above my head that would be experienced some day. I am sorry to say that that was really the best of poetry that we had.

I think that my great lack at that time was a helper. I think I would have been a better poet today if I had had a wise professor who saw as Professor Lounsbury did at Yale years later that I had the elements of poet in me. But I was fed too early on a certain type of poetry that got into my blood.

Fry: A sort of easy romanticism.

Field: Yes, an early lyricism. Probably Poe was one of the better ones, but there again you've got the love of that swing of his earful line. I greatly resent the fact that in some way I wasn't in touch with someone who would read the great poetry to me as it was brought later into my life and made its dent later, but not as it could have, had you been brought up on it young. I brought my children up on the best poetry. I agree with Robert Richards: you'd better read children poetry that they don't

Field: understand but will love because of the sound.

Fry: The exposure.

Field: And I think if it's not a knowledge of its beauty, at least a sense of the beauty is there. I read them such good poetry that they both grew up to be great poetry lovers.

Fry: Do tell us something of what kinds of poetry you did choose for your children that you would have chosen for yourself if you could have been two people.

Field: I took The Book of English Verse, the Oxford edition, and I picked out verses of poems from many periods and many different poets. If they were good poems I read them to them regardless of their profound content. And to this day my daughter says that she feels as though her life went in a path, not a path, but that her love of poetry came from going to sleep on the sound of the fine poetry.

I read them Shakespeare, not fully, not wholly, but I read his great lyrics to them. And I read certain soliloquies to them that I thought they would get the strength and wonder of, and they did.

Fry: Is that right?

Field: So of course where I lacked, they benefited. So I gave them some great ideas.

Fry: The next generation.

Field: Yes. If you missed something, you don't want your children to miss it.

Fry: No. Well, and you did have an exposure to poetry but not as deep an exposure to great poetry.

Field: Not great. When I went into my last year in high school, I had a wonderful teacher there, Rachel Malcolmson (how do I remember the names of those who--?). She made us read a poet that even today isn't so much loved, and that's Milton. He's considered too cold, but I loved Milton. I remember having to write an essay on him, not on him, but on Satan as he appeared in "Paradise Lost." And I asked a friend of mine, "How in the world do I begin an essay on Satan?" He said, "Begin in: 'In spite of all his faults I love him still.'" [Laughter] And that was exactly what I did because all the critics of Milton said the

Field: strongest and most penetrating, powerful character in "Paradise Lost" was Satan. Well, she really instilled love of Milton.

And then we did begin to read Shakespeare with her but of course that wasn't like having him in earlier years when your memory is strong. I can remember the poems I learned in childhood and adolescence and I can't remember the ones I learned later.

Fry: Yes, they get crowded out somehow.

Field: Yes. Well, I read the children all of these things, and I read them Keats and Shelley a great deal.

On Understanding The Child

Fry: Well, try to sum up your adolescence, then. It seems to me that you were really beginning to find the roots of a freedom, although the search had a pretty bad setback in a weaker first marriage, I guess, at first.

Field: At first.

Fry: It seems to me that we have gone over this idea of your beginning to have an individualism about religion, although you weren't conscious of it, probably, at that time. But you were exposed to some other sorts of feelings and attitudes toward religion, and toward the role of woman in society and her relationship to her husband and all this, which later on did bear fruit.

Field: It did, and I think one of the marked, important points in my adolescence and in the adolescence of all my generation is what we began with, that there was so little, if anything, known. I told you last night talking to my very very bright son-in-law I said I dread this portion of the interview because it's so vague in my mind and I couldn't quite focus on just exactly what were the elements of adolescence. And he said, "Well, you know, Sara, I have an idea that that word wasn't even used then."

Fry: Yes.

Field: And I feel that, considering that that's only seventy years ago, that they made immense strides in understanding this period with its moodiness, its tears, its easily hurt feelings, its

Field: terrible sensitivity, and I'm hoping that other adolescent children gain from the knowledge.

Fry: Yes. We were talking about the advent of Freud's influence around 1920, which was a little too late to do you much good. But I was sitting here thinking: You have told us about so many influences which were so close at that time. Your home was a great influence in your adolescence. And a kind of paradox seems to come out here which may or may not be true, that now parents are better educated about adolescence. Goodness knows, you can hardly turn on the radio without being educated about adolescence! And yet at the same time then you had a full array of parental influences on children. Children are not in the home near as much now, so even if all parents know more about it they don't have as much to influence. Do you think that's true?

Field: I do. I think that what conclusion I would draw from what you say and what happened in my time of ignorance on the part of sociologists and psychologists is that rebellion is a natural thing in our children, that it would be under cover in the family where discipline was as strong as it was in ours and when so little was known about what repressive measures do to children. But it would be there, and that while we comment so on the children who are rebellious and pull away from their parents today [it] is only what they would have liked to do then but didn't dare. And I also do think that there are very many diverse influences in the home, but perhaps there, unless the home is a good one-- I can't say that all the influences in my home were constructive ones. Some were destructive.

Fry: I guess in a lot of homes at that time where the parents didn't realize what a sensitive period this was for children--they just knew that if they were very hard to live with, that there would be a great many destructive influences. And I was just wondering if today the kids find more destructive influences outside the home because they are out away from the home more, so that our new-found knowledge really isn't helping us much. This is a dismal conclusion and I wish you'd refute it.

Field: Well, I don't know enough to refute it. I can only see that repressive measures can make for the same results in this time of knowledge that they did in my time. I mean by that that if children feel too many pressures on them, no matter how dear their parents are and how centered in the home the life of children are, I see this rebellion cropping [out] everywhere. Sometimes the most educated families go through it.

Field: You take my daughter. She believed in bringing her children up by scientific ways. All right, they're all considered wrong now. The child isn't allowed to cry and cry and not be picked up. Books of her day said, "Never pick up a child. He'll learn not to cry." Now we know that when a baby cries it is feeling insecure. It's cast in this great world and this must seem vast and vague and strange, and a little baby must feel like a fledgling in a nest, that might get kicked out at any time. It ought to be picked up.

So I don't know what the [answer to the] question is to whether the wisdom will ever be perfected as to adolescent children, I mean babies and so on.

Fry: Well, do you have anything else to add?

Field: Today a television brings a family together. They all sit around and look at what--

Fry: Donald Duck.

Field: Donald Duck. I think it's extremely hard to say yet, it probably never can be said, just why there are the same kinds of rebellions now, with all the knowledge, that there were in my time, a volume of knowledge. I think you have to come to the conclusion that it's a period where it's natural for a child to rebel. It's beginning to feel its own identity and its personality more.

Fry: Yes, and it's going to have this rebellion.

Field: Even when it's wisely guided. And then there are other elements in the child itself. I see the results in the children of the same family and under the same influences.

Fry: Even going through the same regime and with the same people.

Field: Yes, they turn out differently.

[end of interview]

IV THE COURTSHIP AND THE WEDDING

[March 21, 1960]

Plans for the University

Fry: You have said that you and Mary were very, very close all during the time that you both were at home. Then she went to college when you were about a freshman in high school. And you graduated from high school about four years later in January. Did you see Mary very much when she was in college and you were in high school?

Field: Not very much, but enough to make me love what she was doing at the University of Michigan. I came to love this university and to want to go there beyond anything else. Detroit being just thirty miles from Ann Arbor and an electric-car line connecting them, I was able to go down weekends and stay with her at the sorority house. There I went to classes with her, and she had some of the great men of the time in various subjects. I wish I could remember their names. And also I went to classes with her roommate who was a medical student. Her roommate was Blanche Boyle who later married Dr. Brown. This I remember very well. She took me to hear Professor Nobie who was a great man in the field of germs, one of the great early, I believe, discoverers of the matters concerning germs. Also she had another professor, who was very, very eminent, named Dr. Vaughn. He was a perfectly delightful lecturer.

You wouldn't think a high school girl could be fascinated by technical lectures in the field of medicine. But I was, and because these men were so simple in their explanations and in their delivery and so delightful and humorous as well it was a sheer joy to go with either my sister or Blanche to their classes.

Fry: What background had you had in this, anything?

Field: No, I hadn't had any. It was all new to me and fascinating beyond words.

Fry: for heaven's sake, then you just dived in at the college level.

Field: Yes, I dived in at the college level thanks to them.

Fry: It's too bad you had to waste time in high school, Sara.

Field: Well, I think I might have been allowed to skip at least the last grade and plunge in, but go I was determined to do. As far as I can remember, my father had not made an objection to Mary's going after she graduated from high school. It must have been very soon, though, that on a vacation at home she and my father clashed on some subject. He was sure that her mortal soul was in danger because in a course she was taking in the philosophy of history she had come to grips in some of the orthodox Christian ideas. I remember very well when the clash happened although I wasn't present. She came out from the interview with my father in tears, and anger also. He had evidently told her that if she was determined to go back he would not support her.

And it was at that time, as I remember--though I will have to correct these dates later, I have written to her to please tell me them but she is slow in answering--that she wrote to my mother's friend, Mrs. Loring in Boston. My mother had gone to a very fine Friends' school just out of Providence as a girl. There she had made some lifelong friends. Among them was this lady who became Mrs. Loring--I can't remember what her maiden name was--but for her time she was considered wealthy. Mary asked of her: could she let her have fifty dollars a month during her time in college, and that she would pay every cent of it back.

Mrs. Loring disliked my father, as I found out greatly later. She felt he was dictatorial and he had made trouble for my mother in connection with her older sister Elizabeth because he felt that Aunt Elizabeth was too worldly, and also, I have to say, [he] wasn't always kind about Mother's friends that she had made in school. He sometimes made disruption between them, but he hadn't between Mrs. Loring and my mother. And Mrs. Loring, I think largely because she so disapproved of my father, told Mary she would give her the fifty dollars a month. It's a very interesting insight into the economic situation that she could live on fifty dollars. Of course we have to remember that it is worth three times that now. So that she was taken care of, but my father told her that she could not come back home any more.

Fry: Oh, goodness.

Field: Why I didn't record in my mind more what she did during vacations,

Field: I don't know. She must have gone to different friends and lived with them at that time. But I do remember that when my father was off on long trips and she was anywhere in the vicinity of our home she used to come home, and my mother would say nothing about it.

And it was typical of her that the thing I remember one summer was that she worked for the Florence Crittenton Home, which was a home to protect young unmarried girls who had had babies, illegitimate babies, and she used to bring these little babies up to the house and let them play on our very beautiful lawn, dark children who had not had any such privileges in the home that they were in because where it was situated it had no real grounds around it. So this was a very [characteristic] thing of her, that she loved all the institutions that in any way ministered to people who [were in need], and particularly she was interested in those who were rebellious or who were defiant at society, or who because of defiance were outlawed, because of course people were perfectly appalled that she would bring these little illegitimate children up to the house.

Fry: Let me ask you what your mother thought of this?

Field: My mother was always tolerant of these things, and she felt sorry for these girls who had gone astray, as she put it, and very grateful that her daughters hadn't been exposed to any such experiences. I remember her as being perfectly welcoming to all these children. I look back upon that with joy to think that she was so, and that really all the things that were difficult in our lives were made by my father, not by her.

I may seem particularly unfair to him, but these are the impressions that I had and that my older sisters had. He got a little easier on the younger one, Marian, never on my brother Eliot. But the fact that both Mary and Alice were banished from the home, and that probably I would have been if what I shall record further hadn't happened, I think is mute testimony, not so mute, rather eloquent testimony to the fact that my father was extremely dictatorial and narrow and insisted on his way of life for us all.

Fry: Yes. Well, these objective things stand out about your father, his simply refusing to let your two elder sisters come home at all. I mean he just absolutely kicked them out of the family.

Field: That's it.

Fry: And the rather strict regime he kept inside the family, these are things that do bear testimony to your own feelings, so that you shouldn't feel guilty about it.

- Field: Well, I hope not, although my daughter often thinks I'm partial to my mother and unfair to him, but one has to record one's life the way one has seen it and felt it.
- Fry: Yes, that's what we're after here. I think we're ready to go into--when you graduated, when you were graduated, I should say.

Hopes for College Dashed

- Field: What I want to bring out here is that my father waited until very late after my plans were formed. I had gone back into high school, as I told you, to get extra credit. My plans were formed to go [to the university], and I assumed he would let me because I had evidently shown more meekness than the others, though, there were always [rebellious feelings].
- Fry: That he couldn't see?
- Field: Yes, and I rather thought he would let me go. And what I resented about it was he waited until so long until--and then he wrote me a letter and said if I were planning to go to the University of Michigan it was not with his approval or support. And of course that brought things to a culmination in me as far as feeling that in some way I could not live in his home where these dictatorial things were done.
- Fry: When did Mary enter the university, at mid-year, or was she a fall entrant?
- Field: She must have entered at mid-year, and I also entered high school in mid-year. And that's why I was able for all those years that she was in college to go to Ann Arbor as often as I did and to feel identified with the University of Michigan in my own small way.
- Fry: During those years that you were visiting Ann Arbor, did you have any beaux at Michigan, too?
- Field: Yes, I did. I had a very fine beau, and it seems to me rather pathetic than in these older days I can't even remember his name. I remember how he looked. He was very handsome. And I remember how he would take me skating in the months that that was possible and driving in the other months. And altogether I think very likely that also had a pressure on me to go to the University of Michigan, because he was below my sister, a little younger.

Field: I think when she was a senior--he hadn't even come there when she entered. I think he came there later. Well, anyway, I know that all those years there was a building up in my heart of a desire to go and a feeling that I would go. Perhaps it was wishful thinking. Perhaps it wasn't a proper ability to estimate my father, but he seemed very proud of my graduating from high school with honors. I was made the class poet and the class historian. Those were very great honors in that day. I just assumed that seeing that I did love learning he would let me go. He and I had had no religious difficulty up to that time. I had gone to church at all the proper times and done all the proper things. So that is why I went back, evidently, to take some French so I could enter in the fall of that year. And all those months that I was going back to high school to take--there was no intermission--but I couldn't go to college.

And then quite suddenly he wrote me a letter. My father was the kind that when he had something he felt very deeply about he couldn't talk to you very well about it, so he always wrote you a letter, a voluminous letter.

Fry: Oh, it wasn't because he was away on a trip then?

Field: No, not as I remember it. He may have been away on a trip and written it. But it was a thunderbolt. It came, as I remember, in the early spring of this year in which I was working on French, and it said that I was not to go to the University of Michigan, that if I wished to go anywhere he would consider helping me go to a college up in Kalamazoo, as I think I've told you before, in Michigan, and I no more wished to go [there] than I would like to have gone into what you might call dishwashing for a living.

Fry: You mentioned to me once that this college later became connected to the University of Chicago?

Field: Yes it did, a pretty decent college.

Fry: But that at that time it was very orthodox in its religion?

Field: Very orthodox. Chicago was, too, a Baptist college.

Well, I have no doubt it was this sudden, terrible dashing down of hopes that were built up all those years that made me feel I must get away from my home at all costs. One cannot look back and say what one actually felt. I only know I cried myself to sleep night after night. I only know I felt something very unlovely toward my father. And I was

Field: therefore in a state to be prepared for what was going to follow.

The Reverend Albert Ehr Gott

In the late spring, two or three weeks after this letter had come, there was a big Baptist convention in Detroit, and one of the people who came on to it was a man named the Reverend Albert Ehr Gott. Now, something has to be told about his background to make everything clear. My father and mother had known him in Cincinnati where I was born and left as just a baby. He was a great deal older than I, needless to be said, and he had had a rather strange career. He was born into a fine German Bohemian musical family. His oldest brother was the leading vocal teacher of his time in the Middle West, and at his house all the great singers of that day--like Schumann-Heink, who was in her youth then--would gather. Every other member of the family was musical and passionately fond of music in a way only Germans seem to feel it.

The second brother, named Oscar (the oldest brother was named Louis and is remembered to this day) had a beautiful baritone voice, and was a singer in a little choir. I think he even had concert tours. I know Schumann-Heink sometimes took him on tours later to supplement her own concerts.

Fry: Oh, as a singer, you mean?

Field: Yes, as a singer, and possibly a pianist. That I don't know. I could find that out.

Fry: I thought maybe you meant to accompany her.*

Field: Yes, he probably did. But I think that she found that to have another singer on certain tours was a wise idea for her voice, preservation of her voice. Whatever it was that made her take him along, I don't know, but I do know that he had a tuneful voice, and it must have had something to do with that.

Fry: I can't resist asking you here if Albert ever told you anything about Madame Schumann-Heink.

Field: Oh, he didn't need to. I met her at Louis' house.

Fry: Oh, you did. Well, can you tell us something about her?

*Oscar Ehr Gott was an accompanist to Madame Schumann-Heink. (K.C.)

Field: Only that she remained to the end a German hausfrau, along with that wonderful voice. She was as proud of her linen closet as she was of her voice. She was an extremely simple and plebeian kind of person, but blessed with this wonderful voice. As far as I know, I think it had one of the great ranges of all times. She was adored, naturally. And she was a friend of Brahms'. And you'll remember Brahms really wrote that famous lullaby that she used to sing as an encore so often, for her.

Fry: How did she manage to remain plebeian through all this? I mean, do you have any idea how--?

Field: Just because.

Fry: You know, there must have really been pressures on her to become the theatrical star--

Field: In a way, she was the grande dame of singing, but it never did affect this hausfrau nature of hers. The home was the stable thing and the core of her life. You might say she went from it to do her singing, rather than to sing and [inaudible] all around it.

Fry: I see. Well, when you met her at the Ehrgott home, how did you get this impression? I was wondering, was it in her conversation?

Field: Yes, and she would never talk very long about music, although she was extremely well versed in it. But always the conversation managed to slide off into food or household supplies, and particularly fine linens, which she was fascinated with.

Fry: That's most interesting.

Field: I only mention this in passing because I saw her only two or three times. We went away so soon, you see, that I didn't get much more opportunity after that here.

I would like to tell a little more about singing and [inaudible] of this brother, [and of] Albert Ehrgott becoming what he was. The mother, who was a widow when I met her, lived with a daughter who had married a man who was at one time wealthy. He'd lost most of his money and they had to live in a much more simple style, but they never had less than two grand pianos, even in a small living room.

Fry: Living otherwise simply but--

Field: Yes, and always having music, four-hand [inaudible], six-hand

Field: [inaudible], on the piano, always having guests there who loved music and who would get together and sing around the piano. He [Albert Ehr Gott] was, in other words, really as far from the Baptist Church, as his birth goes, as any man could be. He was bohemian, unconventional, completely irreligious in a way. I haven't a doubt they all believed in God.

Fry: But not connected to the church, you mean?

Field: Not connected to the church. I never saw an evidence of that. When this brother [Albert Ehr Gott] became religious and preached to them about drinking beer and would prefer to go off to all kinds of religious meetings instead of mingling with the family at youthful parties, they were just completely baffled by it. They didn't see any explanation that they could understand. What was this all about, anyway, that he should become suddenly so antagonistic to their way of life.

His mother, I remember, when we went there on our honeymoon-- to which I will come later, but I have to tell you now that she took me aside and asked me if I wouldn't try to help him see what a fine family he had, and how good the brothers were and how physically right it was for them to drink their beer at their bohemian parties.

Well, he had had a young minister in Cincinnati who, I understand, had a great deal of magnetism. His name, even now I remember hearing of, was Myers. And in some way Albert Ehr Gott had fallen under his magnetism. Personally, I have a feeling that there was a great inferiority complex in him. He didn't have any special voice. He could sing somewhat but not at all with the quality that would have made him a special singer. He saw all of his family more or less successful in their professions, and he had to go to work as an accountant. He studied, we call it today, public accounting.

Fry: Oh, a CPA?

Field: CPA, that type of thing, and he acted in that capacity, for a big glass and china firm.

Fry: Oh, he did? So this was not an adolescent rebellion of his then? This break with his family occurred later on in his life?

Field: No, no. All the time that he was working in this glass and china shop he continued to be a member of the group until he began to fall under the influence of this Dr. Myers. How that happened I've forgotten, if I ever did know. But quite young he began to

Field: go to this First Baptist Church in Cincinnati, and my parents were members of that. You know that Cincinnati is very strongly a German city. It was settled by Germans and I think that is one of the reasons why it has a great call of music to the area. They come from all over the United States.

Here was a family--you must try to visualize it--living a life that was what you might call the good life, certainly immersed in music, and cultured in many other ways too. Of course, I knew they knew poetry, especially German poetry, very well. Here they were with an oddity on their hands, someone who began to be very religious, wouldn't join their parties any more, told them they shouldn't drink beer, which to them was like they shouldn't drink water. For a German not to have his beer was unthinkable. Why, there were beer gardens all over Cincinnati, summer beer gardens where the northern German people loved to go and have a cold beer on a hot day.

Fry: That sounds logical, Sara, that not finding any sort of reward in the music world like everybody else in his family did, or status in it, he simply just took over an entirely new frame of reference, new standards.

Field: I think that's it, and especially because this young minister told him that he would make a wonderful minister. He said he was born to be a minister. And he had what I suppose they call their intense conversion. In my later years, having become perhaps a little more observant of why these things happen, I think that he was really restless in the environment of his family, as you say, because he didn't seem to have exactly the status they did. So when he told them he would become very important in some field, he immediately wanted to do it. So he began to save his money. All this, you see, happened way back in a time before I was born and when my parents first met him at the First Baptist Church which they attended. He began saving money to go to the theological seminary. Evidently the theological seminary in those days didn't require too much preparatory work because I don't think he'd gone to more than high school.

But my parents were much impressed with this young man who had come out of this--to them--so foreign an atmosphere.

Fry: And an evil one.

Field: Well, [inaudible] there is questionable-- They coveted [cosseted?] him and made great [inaudible] of him, so whenever he came to Detroit as he sometimes did in later years on certain church matters, they had him come to the house as a guest.

- Field: I was just trying to think how much older--I was now approaching nineteen and he was over thirty, thirty-one, I think.
- Fry: Well, that's just twelve years.*

"The Stage was Set"

- Field: Twelve years, about. Anyway, it seemed a lot older. But when he came to the house in this month of May, I think it was, that I had had this letter from my father, I was very susceptible to the fact that he looked upon me as a very proper person to be a missionary's wife, because he had just resigned his pastorate in Springfield, Ohio, and was going to go to a pastorate in Rangoon, Burma. So I began, of course, to attend all these meetings of this council on which he'd come.

And he felt romantic about this girl, who was a little girl when he first visited the house, who was just growing up and sometimes made him a cup of coffee or tea or something. And it was inevitable that in my desire to get away from home I accepted his proposal of marriage and certainly it was a supposed love affair on my part. And I imagine it was. I loved as much as I could at that time.

- Fry: And with the knowledge you--

- Field: And with the knowledge I had, or didn't have. Also you can imagine the joy of my parents who had known him all the years that I was growing up, and here [inaudible]-- I'm sure that he feared because I must have been showing my rebellion against the method of my father's regime.

- Fry: That brought everything out into the open?

- Field: That brought it all into the open. And certainly in my heart it made me long to get away. I wonder if I've made this background clear.

- Fry: I think so, unless you want to--

- Field: It's so necessary for you to understand that my parents knew him at a critical time in his life, in Albert Ehr Gott's life, and became interested in him as a convert and as a rising young minister, as they felt he would be--

- Fry: In their faith?

*Albert Ehr Gott was born in 1863 and Sara Bard Field in 1882, making 19 years difference in their ages. (K.C.)

- Field: --way back when I was a baby. So the stage was set perfectly in every way, and it was set to catch me, with a trap on it, I mean, to catch me because of my--
- Fry: It filled so many needs for you right at that minute.
- Field: Yes, it did, it filled so many needs. So I just said I would marry him.
- Fry: Well, it seems pretty logical how this would please your father. How did your mother feel about it? Did she have any reservation about your marrying a man older than you?
- Field: I think she felt a little sorry to have me marry so young. I wasn't nineteen yet, you know. You see, I wouldn't be nineteen until September, and this was in the May before. I graduated quite young from high school.
- Fry: She probably coveted some kind of college education for you too, I guess.
- Field: I think she did, and I think of all her children I was closest to my mother. I had come after the death of the baby that was hers before that. I always felt it filled some kind of need to have a child in her arms again, and I was a loving child. Altogether, I think Mother approved of the marriage very much but was saddened also that we had to go so far away.
- Fry: But it was better than having things come to the awful culmination that they had come to with your two older sisters, where you wouldn't be allowed to return home if your father was there.
- Field: And also I think you ought to realize, Chita, that my marriage was as much an expression of rebellion as Mary's going off to college in spite of my father.
- Fry: Yes, even though he was a Baptist minister.
- Field: Yes, but it was a rebellion. I don't think I would have, I mean, thought [of it], you see, had I been allowed to carry out the deep desire of my heart. And not being allowed to I think I must have said to myself--I remember thinking it many times in later years--that I evidently felt that foreign travel would be a cultural thing.
- Fry: Well, yes.
- Field: And being cut off from any source of getting it in the way I had

Field: hoped, I think I turned to Mary as a chance for [inaudible]. Travel always does give [inaudible], and I feel to this day it did give me--

Fry: This compensated for the lack of college?

Field: Yes. Of course, we weren't married immediately. This was in May that the convention came, and we weren't married until the following September [1900] because he had certain months to fulfill with the church from which he was resigning in Springfield, Ohio. And of course I had to have a trousseau and all the things that a girl has to have.

But immediately the following September we had a big church wedding.

Fry: Oh, I can imagine how big that must have been.

Field: It really was a beautiful ceremony, if I do say so. The girls were all in a kind of train, all of white, carrying little green and white books from which they sang the Lohengrin words, as well as to have the Lohengrin march played, you know. And it was quite beautiful. And my little sister was flower girl, and my sister Mary was [inaudible]. She was evidently allowed to mingle with the holy ones.

Fry: Was your oldest sister there?

Field: No. I don't ever remember her being back in my life again at all until many, many years later. It's very sad. But you could see that out of this kind of atmosphere rebellion was bound to come and one took whatever form one could. I think that if I had been a little more of my sister's temperament--aggressive, in other words--and had thought out a way to go to college on my own, this might not have happened.

But I wasn't that type, too shy and too withdrawing at that time to do those things, though I deeply admired them in Mary. In fact, I worshiped them in Mary. That's why I say she had such a very great influence on me at that time, all for the good and for the bad, because in her acceptance of my worship she made me almost a kind of slave in later years. Although as I look back and think of how little she wrote to me and how many years there were in our lives that we were separated I am quite astonished to see how alive this sense of possessiveness and my response to it was in years when it became [inaudible].

Fry: It was like apron strings, only with your sister instead of your mother?

- Field: Exactly. And just as she had always wanted me to come and read to her or amuse when she didn't have her own young crowd around her or some members of it, and then would send me out of the room when they appeared, so it was in later years she always wanted to be in on everything in my life, if she herself at that time had nothing to fill it for the moment. It's all very complex.
- Fry: Well, that's something.
- Field: We're talking about later years.

Courtship

- Fry: There's just one thing here I'm a little curious about--
- Field: Oh, I wish you would ask many questions.
- Fry: --and that's more detail on your courtship with Mr. Ehrgott. You and he were in town together just for the time of the convention, which was how long?
- Field: I think it lasted for probably a week or ten days.
- Fry: And this was the first time you'd ever--
- Field: He was living at our house, you see.
- Fry: Oh, he was living at your house.
- Field: Yes, he always was a guest at our house in the years past, as I mentioned, when he had come through Detroit or to Detroit or whatever. You know, a child didn't pay much attention to it. I didn't pay much attention to him then.
- Fry: But this time was the first time that you and he had any real awareness of each other as a member of the opposite sex.
- Field: Exactly. I think I was too small when he'd been there before. I imagine there'd been several years, you know, at that age a few years--I imagine I'd been about twelve or thirteen when he'd been there the last time before this convention.
- Fry: Well, I was wondering just what a courtship with a Baptist minister who was very proper would entail at that time. [Tape turned off and restarted]

Fry: You were about to tell us about this courtship with the Baptist minister who was so pious.

Field: Well, we walked back and forth to the various meetings. Then of course coming home at night in the spring air, in the spring light, and Detroit was at its loveliest then. The magic of spring worked. I remember very well one night that we came home and sat on my father's porch which was overhung with white wisteria which had a beautiful odor, and he asked me to marry him.

Fry: Even nature had conspired.

Field: Even nature had conspired. I can't remember that there was anything very intense about it, although it was true he took me over to Belle Isle and we went canoeing on the canal there that runs to that lovely island.

Fry: Oh, that's beautiful there.

Field: A beautiful island laid out by the same man that did Central Park in New York, [Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.] and it really is his idea [inaudible]. We just, I suppose, said the things that young people that think they're in love--or at least on my part I thought I was. I don't want to obscure any truth now because of the realization of what love is as I later knew it.

Fry: Because I suppose--

Field: I thought I was very much in love. I remember being glad for the letters that came. I'd watch the mailbox after he left, you see. But for any very intensive [inaudible], I think I was still depressed, and he did bring me out of that state of depression by being in love with me, and I think he was genuinely in love. And I think I was as much in love as a girl my age without knowledge, which we never had at that time, and who had just come out of her most bitter disappointment, could be.

But I don't think it was the intensive Romeo and Juliet affair that demanded a balcony scene and all those lovely expressions. But I know that it was sincere as far as I knew how to be sincere.

After the Wedding

Then he went back, as I say, and our wedding occurred in

- Field: September. At first we decided to go by boat from Detroit to Cleveland to visit some very dear old friends of his. I don't know whether it is proper to speak of these things on this or on this kind of an interview, and yet one has to be honest with the life. I have to say that I was frightened to be alone with him the first night, and he was decent enough to leave me alone on the ship because I was quite sick, probably a good deal of it psychosomatic, but we knew nothing of such things then, and I seemed to be getting quite sick from the boat, a turbulent ride. And when, the next night in Cleveland, he naturally did want a sexual relation I was simply terrified. And when, of course, being a virgin, the inevitable occurred that I found myself all bloody, I rushed to the bathroom and got into the tub and wept my poor young heart out. I thought, "And this is marriage." It seemed perfectly dreadful. So you can see how far from being in love I was because--
- Fry: Making love had nothing to do with love, as far as you could see at that time?
- Field: No. Summer nights and walks and canoeing and saying charming things to one another. And somehow the reality of what it was when you are so young and not in love in a genuine way, which makes the relationship right, I feel it's all so indicative of my psychology that I venture to record this.
- Fry: Yes. Well, I think this is so much a part of it that it's valuable to have this in. This follows up what you said before on your, like the psychologists say, development of sex awareness in adolescence and how you just somehow skip that.
- Field: As I think I explained on the records, I was aware of it in attractions or repulsions, which I think [inaudible] as part of the adolescent being I think is marvelously protected in adolescence. You do also have repulsions as well as attractions. But I would not say I had not had adolescent feelings.
- Fry: But they were unexplained?
- Field: But they were unexplained and certainly hadn't become very physical. May I say this, they were more nebulous, as it were. They were attractions--
- Fry: Of your total person.
- Field: Yes. For instance, I think I talked of a boy that lived down the street. Well, I would have given my arm to walk home from school with him you see. There was all that kind of it. But it didn't seem to be related to the actual physical relationship because

Field: I was so unaware of the totality of that. I only had intimations of what that was. And I presume I had the idea that one could skip it if one wanted to.

Fry: Well, just before you were married what sort of education did you get along these lines?

Field: None. My mother told me one day that I should be very careful not to let Albert Ehrigott lie down beside me when I was lying on the couch. And I thought: why not? Then I began to think about responsibility and so--

I know this all must sound to the modern woman like utter nonsense. They can't know in what dense ignorance the properly brought-up girl (who was most improperly, but "properly" brought up) could be.

But I will tell you that just as I was leaving on my wedding trip--oh, there was of course a supper at the house, you know, a wedding supper--and then we went to get this boat. Just as I was leaving, my mother thrust a book into my hands and said, "This is something you must read." Well, you don't set out suddenly and start reading a book on Physical Life of Women, which was its name.

Fry: On your honeymoon?

Field: On your honeymoon. It's a little late, I would say.

Fry: Really, that--

Field: I had said to women in later life when I was a minister's wife that I felt it was shameful that sex, which is the vehicle of bringing in the new life, the new generation, should be looked upon as something so unspeakable that you can't talk to your children about it. I told women that in the course of my days, young as I was. "They should be told," I said, "and they should be told thoroughly and not given any impression that you are afraid of telling them because then they'll get afraid, too, or they'll get it mixed in crazy ideas and they'll learn it from sources they shouldn't learn it from."

Fry: My, you were really ahead of your time there.

Field: No, it came out of just my own experience. I was really in no time at all, looking back, indignant that I hadn't had more understanding.

[end of interview]

V MISSIONARY BRIDE

[April 1, 1960]

On Display

- Fry: We are ready to proceed on your marriage from the second night of your marriage in Cleveland on toward Burma. Did you go directly to Burma?
- Field: No, we did not. It was the policy of the American Baptist Missionary Union in those days to (what seems to me now) display their missionaries to the various churches, which of course had to support them, so they sent us about a little. We went back to my husband's pastorate that he had left to take this pastorate in Burma. That was in Springfield, Ohio. Then we went from there to Boston. And we had to speak in several churches in and around Boston, all Baptist, of course. This was, I think, also a saving of expense for the union because we were to sail from Boston. After this tour of the churches, in which my husband spoke and I was merely introduced and everybody ohed and ahed over this young thing going out, and also I think were quite impressed with my rather pretty clothes, for my mother had insisted on my having a very elaborate trousseau, at least as I look back on it.
- Fry: Pretty clothes are a little unusual, I guess, for a Baptist missionary?
- Field: Oh yes. The one that all [inaudible] were also displayed at various times or came back from long experiences and told what they had done in the countries that they had been in. They all looked a little shabby and old-fashioned, at least to my young eyes, so I think that the fact that they were particularly impressed with my youth and my wardrobe was about all I contributed to the missionary union's coffers, because I certainly in those days didn't speak at all.

Europe

- Field: So in time, having finished the rounds of the churches, we took ship at [inaudible], England. The idea was that we would go to England a little earlier than had been anticipated, I think at first, so that I could see something of Europe. That was a great [inaudible] part of my husband, knowing how provincially I had lived. We landed in Liverpool, and after going to London, in which city I was open-mouthed with wonder, seeing all the buildings about which I had read but never had thought to see. People didn't go to Europe so much in those days.
- Fry: This was a rare opportunity?
- Field: Yes. And I think perhaps this incident might be of value in many ways. We were on the train going to Stratford-on-Avon. I was just thrilling with anticipation of seeing Shakespeare's birthplace and all the memorial buildings now [inaudible]. On the train, which was made up of compartments, a very fine gentleman was already seated in our compartment. He was reading the London Times, of course, and held the paper firmly in front of his face because we were strangers, and I think in those days, as perhaps now, the English are reticent about talking to people--
- Fry: --who hadn't been properly introduced.
- Field: Who hadn't been properly introduced.
- Fry: Yes, I have read a great deal on that just recently from Americans traveling abroad.
- Field: Well, I was too excited about what we were going to do to pay much attention to the London Times which faced me, or to care to see what was behind it. And I began chattering as a young girl does about Shakespeare, different portions of plays that I loved that were new to me. I had a very excellent English teacher. And I kept saying, "I wonder if we can see this and that," and finally the London Times came down and here was sitting a rather elegant-looking gentleman with a most kindly face, and he looked at me with a very fatherly look, and he said, "Excuse me, but I take it this is your first trip to Stratford." I said, "Oh, yes, this is my first trip to Europe."

And he said, "Well, I could not help but overhear you." He wanted to make it plain he was not listening in on purpose, but who could help but hear the chatter of a young girl full of excitement and just bubbling over in general, and he said,

- Field: "I heard you say that there might be places that you could not get into. And I want to give you this card. I think you'll have no trouble getting in anywhere." And he gave us his card, which he showed us. To this day it grieves me to think that I couldn't keep that card. I don't remember who it was, but he was evidently a person of importance because when we showed the card every door was open to us whether we were there at the right time or the wrong time or whether it was not the right day, and so forth. I think the joy of the encounter with the dream of my life, seeing Shakespeare's birthplace--the place where he is buried was so familiar to me already, the inscription on stone, on his grave--I think that it must have been that that made it seem [inaudible] as to how he was [inaudible].
- Fry: He was forceful.
- Field: But looking back and knowing, as I say, the best English people are like that, it's unusual.
- Fry: It was, it was very unusual. Your enthusiasm must have been quite in your favor.
- Field: Yes. He said, I remember among other things, when I spoke of the Ann Hathaway cottage, which at the time I think they were having some difficulty in England keeping up properly. Probably they were having difficulty with the appropriation of funds for it. And he added, "I wish our own people were as enthusiastic about Stratford and all as you are." So evidently my enthusiasm broke his reticence.
- Fry: This was on a train going from London to Stratford. Perhaps he was from the House of Lords for that district.
- Field: Very likely he was, and it's strange that if his title was on the card, I wasn't impressed with that either. I think I was just too excited to--
- Fry: He simply couldn't compete with Shakespeare. [Laughter]
- Field: No, he couldn't compete with Shakespeare.

Well, then we went to Chester, which was a town which I had long wanted to see because it was probably one of the more medieval towns, and still is to this day, I hear, in England. It has large remnants left of the old Roman wall, and it has these shops with the second-story roofs that go over the whole street. It's quaint and utterly other-worldly in aspect. I'm just so entranced with it all that it is just as if it were

Field: yesterday that I were there. I suppose never again, though I've been there twice since--to England, I mean--did I see with that same young fresh provincial enthusiasim. The time was very short for us so we couldn't go to all the other great cathedral towns that I wanted to see, but--what's that--oh dear, I can't think of that cathedral town now in England. It's one of the true cathedral towns.

But we also visited Oxford and Cambridge, and of course I explored Westminster Abbey in London and was proud to see that they had a bust of Longfellow there among the English poets.

But we had to go on because my husband, who had been here in England before, was anxious for me to see a little of France, and we went to Dover. We crossed the channel from Dover to Calais. There for the first time landing in Calais I [inaudible].

Fry: That was your first experience with non-English-speaking people?

Field: And I hadn't had enough French to be able to cope with it. I had had a great deal of German, but not French. I had gone back, as I explained in a former talk with you. I had gone back to take French in high school [inaudible] before that term was over. So a new language all circulating around me gave me a great sense of being at last in a really very foreign country. I felt lonely then, curiously enough. [Inaudible] something in the fact that my ancestry was deep in English roots [inaudible]. Anyway, I felt that we were in a foreign country in France, and we had very little time there. But we had three days in Paris. And we had a chance to get a pretty good idea, or I had [inaudible] the idea of the beauty of this city. Its layout, as you know, was also done by the same man who did Washington. Did you know that?

Fry: No.

Field: Yes, Paris was the plan in its present august state. So it has that circular form of development, and it's beautiful. It, of course, represents what was then--and I don't know but what they do now in spite of all its decadence--the most aesthetic people probably on the face of the earth. They cared about beauty, cared about its being around them, and nothing was built that wasn't beautiful. Of course, there are so many old buildings like Notre Dame. And all of the things around the Opera, the whole square around there was overwhelmingly beautiful.

Fry: This was in the fall?

Field: This was in the fall. Oh, yes. We had to arrive in Burma or

Field: India in the winter or nearing the winter so as not to be plunged into the hot weather of India which is almost unbearable for white people. None of the English people who lived there ever stayed through it. They went up into the mountains, the region of the Delhi and New Delhi. So it was in the fall that we saw it, and we fortunately had very beautiful weather and the leaves were turned. And while I know spring is a wonderful time to see Paris too--then of course all the trees [inaudible]. It was beautiful enough for my young ability to absorb for me to take [inaudible] the most wonderful city I have ever seen in my life.

Fry: Well, even though you were there for such a short time, you were able to get this atmosphere of people who really cherished beauty for beauty's sake?

Field: Indeed I did. And I think coming from a country that had so many ugly cities--

Fry: You mean England?

Field: No, I mean America, where we didn't build for beauty. Detroit was beautiful in a sense in those days, [inaudible] make nature be a part of it. But it wasn't beautiful in its buildings. They were just rather cheap-looking buildings that were put up in those days. Even the residences, while I suppose they were solid and good, you couldn't say had very fine architecture. I really felt what you might call a happy shock at what a city could be. And it's made me to this day now when I'm old so interested in this rehabilitation that's going on in our own country and so glad [inaudible] where we feel we mustn't let [inaudible] putting in ugly spots in the system.

Then we went to Marseilles. I don't remember much about Marseilles except that it struck me as having a peculiar freshness and lovely atmosphere from being right there on the sea. Also I got interested in the fishermen's section because even a fisherman was picturesque to me in everything they [did], their nets and their boats and all that's connected with their work.

Fry: Oh yes, you were a "landlubber" girl.

Field: Yes, I was a "landlubber." The fresh water excites me.

To India

- Field: We took ship on an unfashionable vessel. I think it was called the Winifredian. It was partly a cattle ship. It carried cattle down below and passengers up above. And whether it was the stench that used to arrive at times from the the cattle or whether it was the roughness of the sea itself, I don't know, but I know I began to be a very poor ocean traveler. I was quite sick.
- Fry: How long did this go on?
- Field: I think it took us about five weeks to reach Indian in those days.
- Fry: You went clear to India on this thing then.
- Field: Yes, on this [inaudible] steamer.
- Fry: You were seasick all the way?
- Field: Yes, I was seasick all the way, and oh my, it was miserable, so that I got very little enjoyment out of the voyage. There would be some days when it would let up some and then it would be worse. I'm trying to realize why it was--it must have been a matter of time--that at Marseilles there also boarded the ship an Englishman and his wife who were very important people in the British government of Burma at that time. I think they must have been rushed to take such a rattly ship, because he was what they called collector of the port for all Burma, and that was a high-paid and important position. And their being on the ship was an extremely fortunate thing for me. Their name, by the way, was Tilly. I had so hoped that when I met Margaret Tilly now [inaudible] a famous pianist and teacher of music, that she was a relation, but she wasn't. But they had just--I think the reason they took that ship was they had delayed a while in England while they got their daughter to bring out [to Burma] for the cool season, and who had just come of age and had been away from them a long time, as all English children were in that time.

The parents who lived abroad in the Orient never tried to keep their children there after they were at least five years old because it was too difficult to get proper nourishment, so they sent them on back to England to be brought up in schools. And Nine Tilly was just being brought out by her parents because she was about my age and was going to be kept there at least through the fall season. I mean by "there" she was going to be kept in Rangoon, Burma.

Field:

Well, the Tillys were very, very kind to both of us, but especially to me. Mrs. Tilly's heart was moved by the fact that I was so young and so ill and so near the age of her own daughter, and she became very motherly toward me. I remember one day when she came in the stateroom and said to me, "My dear, I, as you know, am old enough to be your mother, so you'll pardon me if I ask you, do you think some of your seasickness could be due to pregnancy? You may be in the preliminary stage."

And I said, "Oh, that's impossible, we've only been married six months," or whatever.

And she couldn't help but laugh and she said, "Well, I think it could happen almost any time after marriage," and I was ignorant of this because among my other absurd lacks of observation had been that about the time that pregnancy occurs after a man and woman were married. But anyway, it proved true. And she was so wonderful to me after I had landed in Rangoon, of which I will speak later.

But meanwhile we got off the ship at Calcutta. The Tillys went right on to Angoon, but we had time and the wish to see something of India, and we made a very hurried trip through that country. And hard as it was, I feel it was one of the great, at least if not turning points, [inaudible] points in my thinking, It was a curse on my mind to think about social conditions in the world, because for the first time in my life I saw starving people mingling in the crowd. Twice we saw people drop on the street from hunger, and always there were about us some people whose bones were very visible because they wore very different clothing, especially the Sudra class, as the working class was called, the lowest caste.

The caste system was still prevailing rather as it is now, in spite of [inaudible]. And I who had come from America, where people were taking contributions from washerwomen (as the women who did the laundry were called), and the bootblacks even, taking their pennies to send to famine-stricken India. It was horrifying to see from Calcutta and later also from Bombay great shiploads of grain, rice, wheat, tea, and other edibles, being shipped out of India. And I asked myself, "Why is this?" And they said, "Well, food is sent from the estates of the English landholders. They get more for them abroad, for their products, and from the estates of the rajah whom the English have allowed still to keep their products."

And I said, "But why don't they sell them here to the English government to help feed these people?"

Field: "Oh," he said, "the government doesn't do that kind of thing. The people have to be able to buy it themselves and the Indian people are not able to buy all these crops."

Well, it was all too confusing to me not to be thought about, and I feel that my sense of social justice or injustice began at this point of very vivid contrast between wealthy people, too wealthy, too much, and too indifferent to people who were starving in a land in which they lived and were exploiting.

Fry: What did Mr. Tilly say about this?

Field: They had left. They had gone on to Burma. I'll speak of that later. But at the moment--even now at this age of nearly seventy-eight, I feel the same almost catch at the heart and tears at the terrific impact this made on my well-fed young body and my eager mind and heart, not knowing what my fellow man suffered in this way, and how others knowing it could be so indifferent to it.

We didn't have long in India, but we had long enough to go to Bombay. Of course, we visited the Taj Mahal and we did travel as far north as Delhi, which was then the capital, not the New Delhi, just Delhi. All the time I observed this people living, as it seemed to me, in conditions which made death so much more preferable because it wasn't only their starvation that overwhelmed me, but it was the fact that they were herded on what looked like cattle trains when they had to move about, when they had to go from place to place. They had no decent accommodations.

I haven't a doubt that the English government did a great deal for India. In fact, I know it began to establish schools and establish some hospitals. It generally built roads in some sections of the country that are wonderful yet. And in many utilitarian and educational ways it had its value. But I cannot look back on my impressions of English rule there with anything but horror because of their apparent indifference to this question of feeding the people, and of the fact that the death rate, perhaps that was [inaudible] in the light of the explosion in population they talk about today. But it was simply terrible.

Fry: It must have been.

Field: That was why in those days people had great big families because there were--let's say, they had ten children, perhaps three would survive. I don't know what the exact--

Fry: This must have gone on for a long time. I remember just before World War II I heard that by the time a child was six years old

Fry: in a family he had a fifty-fifty chance to live. In other words, if you had six children only three of them would live, at least up until the age of six.

Field: [Inaudible] that was the way it was, and worse. Sometimes none of them lived. But death was so prevailing everywhere that you had a strange feeling of nature being kind and taking them because [inaudible]. These are the impressions of a very young girl who had not known her world at all.

Fry: Was this shared by Albert?

Field: Yes, he felt it too. I will say for him, though he had many ideas and qualities that were antagonistic to me, that he did feel the wickedness of this situation in the world, the haves and the have-nots he really felt too. And I think it was the reason why, in later life when he had been forced by my health to come back to America, he became a Christian socialist. I don't think he thought much about this either before, although he was thirty-two and I was eighteen.

Fry: But your sensitivity in Calcutta and in India in general--

Field: In general.

Fry: He saw this in a new light.

Field: Once we were entertained at a great estate near Delhi, and I remember speaking out with anger about this at the table of the Englishman and his wife whose names I have of course now forgotten. With them I spoke with indignation and they were very angry. And they said, "We don't discuss such things. This is the way life is and we don't discuss it."

Field: And I could hardly eat, I remember. I just choked my food down with a sense of probably what I'm afraid would be something like malice toward these people. But that was a vivid impression that lasted. It didn't fade, even though we went to a country that was not at all in that condition. In Burma, the Indian working class came over to serve us in the menial positions because these were not available in the Burmese society. There might be a Burmese houseboy to an English officer, but they'd have imports, so to speak, from India of the lowest class over to do the most menial things. The Burmese were not in the same condition that India was at all.

Arrival in Burma

Field: Well, we went back to Calcutta to get our steamer and went across the Bay of Bengal, which separates Burma from India. We knew our dates thoroughly, and so kind were the Tillys who had already, as I say, arrived in Rangoon sometime before. So accurate were they in the memory of the date we were to arrive that we were met at the wharf by their elegant carriage with a span of the most beautiful horses, there being no autos in those days.

Fry: You arrived in style?

Field: Yes. We arrived in Rangoon because we had to go up the Irrawaddy--the Irrawaddy empties into the Bay of Bengal, and it's a deep river and goes all the way up, as you may remember from your reading Kipling, to Mandalay. We arrived in Burma, having had a good chance to see what lay on the banks of the Irrawaddy, which was fascinating. The country was very fertile and very green and beautiful in the fall season. Instead of being taken to some kind of a house where I would have had to begin learning the ways of keeping house in the Orient, we were taken right to the great, cool, spacious mansion of the Tillys. And Mrs. Tilly said, "I want you here because I'm going to help you get acquainted with the ways of a new country, and this is a house in which there is lots of room and cool, and you can look about from here."

As a matter of fact, we didn't have to look about because we were assigned a house finally by the emissaries of the Baptist Missionary Society. I think the "emissaries" mean the older missionaries who were over there. But it was a godsend to go to a place where there was a way of life that I mostly understood (the English had, of course too, their ways, but it was more or less our way, our American way) and to be with such fine understanding people.

The Feast and Famine of India

Now you asked me further back how they felt about this situation I'd seen in India. In the first place, they saw I'd really been shocked deeply and couldn't get over it. And yet it was on my mind constantly and I kept referring to it. And Mrs. Tilly-- I didn't have much chance to see him [Mr. Tilly]; he was a busy man. As I say, he was collector of the port for all Burma, which

Field: was an English occupation, and naturally was away on his trips and other business, and besides in those days Englishmen were shy of visiting much with foreign women, I think--American being very foreign to them. I was very fortunate in the fact that she took me under her wing in that way. I've mentioned that now so many times here that it's been very [inaudible], but I can't get over it yet.

She explained some of these things to me as best she could. She said, "You know, you can't change the social system overnight." And I, begging her to explain how it hadn't been attacked somewhat by all this food leaving India at a time when America was raising money to bring food into India, found that I got very little satisfaction from her. All she could say was, "Well, these people are descendants of the first English settlers in the old days and they had made their money this way, and they only know that that's the way they can carry on. And of course the terrible poverty of India," she said to me, "has been such that it has rather hardened those who look at it, especially the wealthy rajah natives of India who are well fed and have everything." They just overlook it or accept it as a necessary condition in life, because I remember her quoting to me, and I feeling humiliated that it was so, that Jesus had said, "The poor ye always have with you."

I do remember reminding her in a shy way of the fact that he had also told the rich young man who had come to him to be a disciple to sell all he had and give it to the poor. And she said, "Well, if any individual sold all that he had and gave it to them today there'd be just as many starving the next day. It's too terrific a problem to be attacked in that way," and I couldn't argue because I had no experience, you see. I could now, with them. I read deeply in sociology. I know that there are just--that was just as--Nehru is using but not allowing food to be exported except the nonnecessary things that will bring them in money to buy more food.

Fry: I guess industrialization too was not an alternative then, as it is now. The first thing one thinks about in building up a country now, I guess, is this idea of industrializing to use their natural resources and make jobs for the people.

Field: Yes, but if you have read of India's present policies under Nehru, you know that they didn't want just the minimum of industrialization because they feel their people are an agricultural people. They want to preserve the small farm. And of course they now have the great estates, or are buying them up. [Inaudible] is a great disciple of Nehru. I can't think of his name. He's a man as dedicated as Gandhi in his

Field: own way. He goes about preaching this small-land ownership and making the big landowners ashamed that they have more than they need. And they're gaining in that way a great many additions to the small farm.

I remember Yehudi Menuhin telling me two years ago (when he'd been living with Nehru and giving concerts for the benefit of sufferers of the famine, which also had happened in India that year. He'd given everything he had made in his concerts for that. But he was a distinguished guest of Nehru. He either had him at his government house at New Delhi or traveled with him) that Nehru said, "If we bring in lots of machines what will that mean? It will mean gas stations all over for refilling. It will mean repair shops everywhere. We will begin destroying the [inaudible] nature of India itself."

"And while I realize," he said to Yehudi, "the need for a certain amount of industrialization--and we're trying to find out what that amount is and adapt to it--we don't strive to be a great industrial nation."

Fry: Because of the complexities that this would produce in upsetting centuries-old social system--

Field: Absolutely.

Fry: --and ways of living?

Field: That's his idea, confusing people and making India so different a land that the people themselves wouldn't [inaudible] with it.

Indian Religions

Fry: I was thinking of that too as you talked. The Indian people themselves seem to accept this, in part as a result of their religion, that this isn't the only life and that in a way suffering in one life will help prepare you better for the next life. Did you get this feeling, that the Indians themselves--?

Field: Yes.

Fry: This had been going on for so many centuries.

Field: Yes, but I think that feeling, among the educated classes, who are more or less in charge of affairs, has gone. Many, I'm sorry to say, almost repudiate the Oriental religions that taught

Field: that. I say "philosophy" because in Sanskrit the words "philosophy" and "religion" are the same. So the Brahman philosophy, which is probably the oldest of the philosophies in India and which teaches that [inaudible] really all the sects in Hinduism more or less do.

But they interpret it in a very different fashion now. They also say that if you have plenty, they say long ago if you have plenty and don't help those who haven't, in your next life you'll be [inaudible], you'll have to learn what it's like to be a very poor person. I mean those who really live by the Vedanta philosophy I think interpret so much so differently now. For instance, they had their cultural centers and their educational centers and their relief centers--of Vedanta, I mean--and all that has made a reinterpretation of the extreme that people might go to. I think some of the ascetics still go to those extremes. My niece Margaret taught nearly five years in India.* She was foreign correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune and traveled from one end to the other of India. She said she met these old ascetics, or younger ones, but they were fewer, constantly fewer because they were interpreting their philosophy in another way.

And many, of course, of the highly educated Indian people, especially if they'd been sent to Oxford and Cambridge, as many were, repudiated it entirely, had nothing to do with it.

Fry: To the point of getting a heretic--

Field: Yes, I mean, or they become Christians, which is also too bad because I think if the religion is interpreted as it should be, the people should keep their own.

Fry: I was thinking particularly in terms of the working caste, the ones who really had the suffering and death and starvation constantly with them.

Field: Oh, I'm sure they felt it was the law of karma, which is what you're speaking of. Yes, I'm sure they did. But it was against all that was humane to let people suffer just because they had a belief like that.

Fry: Well, yes. And as you say, this very same philosophy certainly did not excuse those who were in a higher caste.

Field: No, no. Their karma was ahead of them too. Now the peasant monks who formed the Rama Krishna Vivikananda Center over there, from which all these swamis are sent out to our different cities here and in England, lived themselves very

*Margaret Parton's work in India was confined to journalism (K.C.).

- Field: ascetically, that's true. What I mean by that, they don't starve. They nourish themselves for their work well, but they don't marry and they don't own anything.
- Fry: That name Rama Krishna makes me think of the traditional Hinduism.
- Field: Well, he's an expression of it. He was later Count Comorant and of course naturally [inaudible], because Hinduism goes way, way back long and long before Buddhism. Buddhism sprang out of Hinduism and they were started long, long before the Christian era because Buddha himself came five hundred years before Christ.
- Fry: Isn't Krishna the concept of an earthly representation of the spiritual life?
- Field: Yes, he is considered an incarnation by his followers.
- Fry: He keeps reappearing, and Rama Krishna is one of those appearances?
- Field: Yes, you got that very, very well. It really is Shiva who is reappearing. Shiva reappeared in Krishna and then it keeps reappearing. There is a beautiful verse in the Bhagavad Gita that says, "When evil is strong and virtue declining, then I come." I mean the incarnation of this unknowable but profound Self, capital S--which Jung borrowed for his philosophy too, by the way.

Vedanta

And it's perfectly wonderful the way that Vedanta philosophy has evolved. It might be well at this point--though I should like to speak more of Vedanta at the end of our talk together because I have found in it my own peace and you might say faith, though it requires so little faith. It leads you right from reason to reason to the door where reason can't enter because the finite mind cannot understand the infinite. I would like to talk about Vedanta later on when we come to that last part of my experiences.

But I'd like to say right here and now that Vedanta means the end of the Vedas. You see, the Vedas are the old, old books. In the fifth century, I think it was, a great philosopher who is only beginning to be taught in our colleges now, our American colleges are just waking up to the neglect there's been of

- Field: Oriental philosophy. Of course it isn't taught in our colleges, but it's Asia's basic philosophy that is taught. And there was a philosopher--I'm not sure of the century, I think it was the fifth century--named Sankara who reduced the elements of the Vedas to its present form called Vedanta. "Anta" means after Veda.
- Fry: Oh, I wondered--
- Field: It means "after" the Vedas, you see.
- Fry: I thought this must have something to do with the Vedas.
- Field: Indeed it does. It's the very soul of the Vedas but it is--you know very well that everything evolves. This is like a great evolution of a profound philosophy, and its authority and authenticity is such that it can evolve, it has a basis to evolve. We shall have to see the same thing in Christianity with the finding of these great manuscripts, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They say that's going to, in fifty years, make a reinterpretation of Christianity itself. And in the same way the Vedas have been reinterpreted in terms of evolutionary growth. And the way that it is taught to us here is such that you can go out to any church in the world and stay in that church, and yet get help from knowing some of the doctrines [Vedanta]. It's very broad and very unfanatical, nonfanatical philosophy.
- Fry: I get the idea that if you can get down to these very basic truths in a religion from what you might call their basic manuscripts such as the scrolls and the Vedas that you'll find that there isn't this conflict between them, that this is after all answering a need common to all human beings, that these truths are, and that a person such as yourself can encompass these things.
- Field: Well, it's just a reinterpretation as the human mind itself grows. Naturally everything that is interested in growth, our interpretation of science is different today, our interpretation of psychology is new and growing. And what was right at the time that I brought up my children, the books such as were written for young mothers are very different from the books my daughter had, and the books she had are very different from the books written about how to bring a child up today. [Inaudible] thought grows, and it's no wonder, unless you're just a fundamentalist or some such nongrowing person, that your religion [grows] with you.
- Fry: And Vedanta particularly emphasizes this as I understand it. One of its main precepts is of growth.

Field: Absolutely it is.

Fry: And a constant searching.

Field: Absolutely. I will say a little more about this later.

Fry: Fine. But this is what you found in India.

Field: I didn't know anything about this law of karma when I went to India. And so I looked on the patient, pathetic cases of these starving people and thought: why don't you rebel? I haven't a doubt that what you have said, that it was this law of karma that kept them from rebelling, because we see the revolution that's going on in Africa now. And those people are in other ways [inaudible], because the British government was never as brutal, could be brutal. And at one time when it shot down certain crowds asking for freedom, it was terrible. But I think the world opinion was so strong that it'll never do that again. And for the most part it was not--

It seemed unable to ameliorate the masses that did starve perennially in these famines. It seemed unable to do that but did try to help the people in its own slow, rather heavy-handed way and in its, alas, way of wanting to get profits out of India. That's what it [inaudible] for, for its riches. And it seems now as you look back incredible that people could walk into these lands, and just because they weren't being developed by the people at the time, would develop them and take them away. It seems incredible that they wouldn't share, at least, more.

Fry: At least keep them from starving.

The Eurasian Baptist Church

Did Albert have any sort of training in the religion and ways of the people he was going to minister to?

Field: No. I think that is a very interesting question and one which I haven't ever considered before, but I don't think he had. Of course he wasn't in a way going to what you might call pure-blooded natives. He was going to be the minister of a Eurasian church, which meant the people were part European and part Asian. There was intermarriage and--oh, he had never had to learn the Burmese language. He preached in English.

Fry: He wasn't going out to save the soul of the savage then.

Field: Well, the Eurasians were considered savage. They didn't know anything about religion, about Christian religion.

Fry: Oh, they didn't?

Field: No.

Fry: Well, that's what I wanted to know.

Field: But this church was established already in Rangoon.

Fry: His job was proselytizing?

Field: Proselytizing among these Eurasian people because as I say he didn't speak a word of Burmese. He would have been a nuisance except among the English-speaking Burmese. There were a good many of those because as I say the English had established inroads in these countries they had occupied.

Well, we were in Rangoon, I believe--

Fry: That's right, up the Irrawaddy in the big mansion.

Field: And I was staying in this mansion, we were staying in this mansion with these very kind English people. Incidentally, their kindness taught me that you can't make any generalities about people at all. I meant to say that the English are hospitable or this or that. It's silly. You meet with all kinds as you do in any case.

Fry: You mean even thought they were representative of the British which you thought were so unjust--?

Field: Yes!

Fry: --but here was someone who was really turning over their household to you?

Field: Yes. I wouldn't exactly say turning over the household. They were having us there as very privileged guests. Then we were assigned a house. It was built like all the houses of--

[end of interview]

VI BURMA: A NEW WORLD

[April 8, 1960]

India and Burma

Fry: Could you start out with the differences you found between India and Burma?

Field: I'll try to because the impressions of these Oriental countries on my later thinking were evidently extremely important. They were the beginning of thinking about social conditions. I'm afraid that up to the age of eighteen I had not given much thought to my fellow man beyond the city of Detroit. The world was very peaceful then, you see. We had only one war, and that a brief one, the Spanish-American War. So I would like to say that, having emphasized the sense of shock, that the social and economic injustices in India made on me, so in the same way the contrast between the land of Burma [India] and the people of Burma was in its way as great a shock, but a pleasant one.

Fry: Do you mean the contrast between Burma as a nation and then the individual people in it?

Field: No, I mean the contrast between India itself and then the Burmese people just across the Bay of Bengal. That is what made the deep impression. I had in my ignorance thought I would go over to a country in which the same kind of poverty and anguished starvation would be evident. But it was quite different. Burma at the time we went there was a country of only eight million with a very fertile soil. And the people seemed all to have been able to make a livelihood without the struggle that I found in India. There were no starving-looking people. They were all healthy and apparently well-fed, and they seemed happy, a situation which wasn't true in India. You had a feeling of sadness in India. Also you had a feeling--although I think this came to me later--of a wiser control of population

Field: [in Burma]. That was another thing which astounded me in my ignorance as to why India allowed her population to get so out of hand, whereas in Burma for some reason or other it didn't seem to be that way. People didn't seem to have such immense families. I presume it may be that the babies were well nourished and didn't die off, and therefore didn't produce with the rapidity of rabbits, as it seemed in India.

But at any rate I got also a shock of what could be done in a country where the soil was fertile, where population was controlled, and also I got my first, I think, glimpse of what it meant for women to be free as the Burmese women were. I'm sure that had an influence in my later work in the feminist movement, especially in the suffrage movement in this country in later years. But that was an extraordinary difference.

Indian women did not seem so much socially oppressed as they just seemed to accept the fact that a woman wasn't of very much importance in the world. She was a breeder, and I never saw a single woman, ever, of course, who sat down at table with her husband. She waited upon him while he ate, and then ate what was left. In the time we were in India because of, I suppose, our missionary connections and because there were a good many Christians in India at that time as now, we were invited into a good many Indian homes. But even after they became Christians this custom prevailed. I remember being very uncomfortable at the table of my host and hostess, if you can say she was a hostess, in India, because she just was a servant in the background.

This was not true at all in Burma. They were probably as free women as ever had existed in society, although I'd need sociological support on that. Perhaps the people in the South Seas had the same freedom. But certainly in the Orient it was very noticeable. As we took up our life in the house which the Missionary Union had given us, we didn't have any Burmese help. They didn't go out for that kind of service. A Burmese here and there would be houseboy to, let's say, an Englishman of means or rank, but he would have a coolie servant over from India, from the Sudra class, the lowest Indian class, to do any of the very menial work. I have never seen any Burmese doing the menial work that the coolies [did] who came across the Bay of Bengal and worked for us, as they did for all the white people.

Fry: These were all Indians?

Field: All Indians. The only time I had a Burmese helper in my house was when my baby was born, and she was a trained nurse who had been in the Lady Curzon Hospital and was a very efficient one indeed. I don't know that Burmese women, as a general thing,

Field: had any higher intelligence [than Indian women], certainly not more than the cultivated and few educated women of India. But they seemed more alert in all fields of life, wherever you saw women, at a bazaar where they were always in charge, and often the man stayed home to look after the babies, and thinking nothing of it. That was all right. Why not?

Fry: Yes, that's what I gathered. The men's role was looking after the rice paddy when it needed looking after?

Field: When it needed looking after, yes. And in the cities I don't remember that I ever saw a man in charge of one of the bazaars that sold the simple things like groceries and dry goods and notions and crafts.

Now and again, speaking of crafts, there would be an artist, I suppose you'd say, or certainly a good craftsman who preferred to sell his own wares. And maybe he didn't have a wife. I don't know. But the general plan was what I've been saying.

Fry: And that nearly everyone, if she couldn't afford a little shop in the downtown section of a village or in Rangoon, would sell her things under the house where the house was up on poles--

Field: Yes, all the houses had to be, not only because of the monsoons and dampness, but to avoid as much as possible the invasion of the insect life and the general life of animals, because snakes were known to be found in the houses even so.

Fry: Did you find these little shops under the houses?

Field: Yes, indeed I did. I had a bicycle in Rangoon and I was just avid to see as much of it as I could. I seemed to know that our stay might not be too long, as it proved not to be. So I would go about exploring. I was very handicapped by not knowing the language, but there's always a way of communicating with smiles, of touching things and looking a question mark if you couldn't make the question in Burmese, and they would in some way get it over to me what the object was. In that way I really felt I identified my life, for so short a period as we were there, with the life of Rangoon. I will have to tell you later because of my need to recall the name of the place where I went up in the north then, where I was the only white woman within many hundreds of miles.

Life in Rangoon

Field: But I could tell you if you want to know how we lived.

Fry: In Rangoon? Oh yes. I was wondering what sort of a house you were given?

Field: We were given one of these houses on what I call stilts, way up in the air. The whole interior was surrounded by a great wide porch. I used to think when I first saw it what wonderful times I'd have sitting out on that porch reading and studying, but little did I know Rangoon.

I remember my first evening that my husband had to go to a meeting to which I was unable to go, and I established myself with a lamp because of course there was no electricity there or any of those things. I established myself with a nice lamp on a table that was on the porch, and within five minutes the swarms of creatures that were about me drove me in and I ended up sitting in the dark under the mosquito netting on our bed to get away from the many, many types of insects which are night-flying creatures and which are attracted by any light whatsoever, so that your peace of mind could only be obtained by getting into the dark.

I suppose if I had lived there longer than I did I would have made myself get used to this, but it was extremely difficult because there were not only night-flying ones, there were day-appearing ones. You'd open a door and flying cockroaches would fly out of the drawer. How they got in one never knew, but they not only got in but they ate your linen. They were the kind that ate linen, ate silk. Indeed I saw once, after I came home, one of Ruth Draper's wonderful monologues of an [English] woman who had lived for many years in the Orient and was looking forward with such joy to going back to [England]. The sense of despondency that was upon her was evident in the way her clothes (soaked with perspiration, which you can't avoid, you have to change every ten minutes if you would avoid that) hung on her, and told the story in itself. When she found out that matters had changed because of the war and that she couldn't go home--

Fry: Where was she?

Field: This was a monologue that Ruth Draper did. Ruth had gone over there and lived for awhile.

Fry: I mean this woman, where was she?

Field: Oh, she was in India but the same conditions persisted in Burma also for whites. The Burmese, of course, were used to it, but the same conditions of dealing with a difficult climate that mildewed everything and of insect life that devoured everything and made your life wretched trying to battle it from your person, even, existed in Burma. You see, that climate right on the equator--Rangoon is probably as near to the equator as you can get and live on it. Many of the wives of English officers over there told me it had been the hardest climate they'd ever been subjected to and they had lived on practically all the English possessions with their husbands.

The lizards were also a great problem to us newcomers. They lived on the damp ceilings of all your rooms; you saw them clinging there. And every now and then one flopped down. I remember at a dinner party one flopping right down in the soup of someone at the table.

And while I'm dwelling now on very small things I am also pointing out that these small things are so unknown in our Western life with its more equitable climate without these enormous changes from terrible rains to drought, each of which has its problems of insect life and animal life [that] have to be met and conquered before you really can feel that you enjoy life in that country.

I was starting to tell you about this monologue, because it was so good, of Ruth Draper's. When this Englishwoman, who'd lived in India for so many years because of her husband's official position, found that the war was coming and their leave was revoked and she would have to stay on, the sense of heartbreak conquered by the reserve of the English was one of the most moving things that I ever saw Ruth Draper do, and how well I could enter into it and know it because after a certain amount of time in the Orient every white person needs from the soul up or down a change back to the familiar climate that was [inaudible]. I'm sure that a few more years there than I had would have resulted in my feeling that way.

As it was, I was very young and while I didn't like all this and felt angered at the battle it caused me domestically to run a house where you couldn't trust that anything wouldn't be mildewed or eaten or something very difficult. Still I found such fascination in the new countries that I didn't get to the point of desperation that some white women do.

Fry: Oh, I see. The newness lent a certain exotic atmosphere that compensated for all the discomforts?

Field: Yes. And I also learned with great respect how people can live under those conditions.

Fry: How did they manage when it was so difficult for the English?

Field: Well, they hung in their closets little lamps filled with coconut oil which burned day and night in order to keep some of the mildew off of the clothes and shoes--particularly leather would mildew dreadfully. If the special boy who was assigned to see that those lamps were kept filled with oil forgot and neglected it, in twenty-four hours mildew would appear. It was as fast as that. Of course, in the rainy season it was almost impossible even under the best care and conditions to deal with it entirely because the rain fell heavily and incessantly for days and days.

In the so-called dry season, which was the hot season, almost all of the white people had to leave the part of Burma I was in, Rangoon and parts like that, and go up north. And it's that experience of mine, going up north and seeing other tribes and the main tribe of those who inhabit lower Burma that I want to recall and talk about that.

Fry: Good. Could you tell me what materials were used in making your house? You know, the termites must have been dreadful.

Field: Yes, the termites were. And there was a white ant that was dreadful too. It was an immense creature and it ate practically anything. The pine boxes in which our goods came over from America, all my wedding presents and treasures were demolished in almost no time at all. Of course we'd been warned, and we unpacked them quickly. But the boxes themselves--I mean you couldn't take any orange boxes and use them for temporary furniture the way many of my friends over here who were waiting to buy their furniture did. Not at all. They would find them all lying in powder around the floor. The white ants of the Orient are a great problem. All the ants are. There's every kind of ant.

Julius Huxley says that the ant could conquer the world if it wasn't for the constant fight put up against them by humans.

Fry: They're supposed to have the most completely perfect structure to adjust to anything.

Field: Absolutely perfect structure, and also strangely disciplined for the right kind of work. They seem to be almost regimented. I remember one day I had said to my cook, to his horror, that

Field: I would stir up a cake because he didn't seem to know much about making cakes. He, like all the other helpers we had in the house, had come over from India. He didn't seem to know what a cake was. So I said, "Well, I have my cookbook and I'll stir it up and bring it down to you at the cookhouse." The cooking was done in a separate little house away from the main quarters because you couldn't have anything done in your living quarters that heated them. It was all you could do to stand the heat as it was. Even in the so-called cool season it would be around in the nineties, and certainly never out of the eighties.

Well, I stirred the cake and just unfortunately left on the table on which I had stirred it evidently a few little droppings of the sweet batter. And when I came back from taking it down to the cookhouse--because I wished to show him how to make it--there was a line of ants an inch wide, an army of them. They had smelled it out, come from some of their ground homes, crawled up the posts that held the house up, and got into that sweet batter.

Fry: In that length of time!

Field: I had to call all the other helpers, the paniwallah and the sweeper boy, in to help me exterminate them. And they knew what to do. They poured some kind of liquid on them that killed them.

Fry: I was wondering if they had any anti-insect--?

Field: Oh yes, they did. They had to have. But it shows you how smart they are [the ants] and how fast they are, that in that little time that I was gone they could have smelled those few little drops of sweet batter and had made for it from way down below.

Fry: This makes me wonder what did you use for furniture?

Field: You had to use teakwood. That was the one wood they couldn't penetrate. They didn't.

Fry: Oh, I see. How beautiful.

Field: Yes, it was very beautiful. I have to say that we didn't buy any. The house that the Missionary Union assigned to us had belonged to another missionary and the necessary furniture, sparse and lean, but fulfilling my needs, was there and it was all of teakwood. Oh, you couldn't use any lighter wood than that and resist these ant-eaters.

Dress and Attitudes toward Fashion

- Fry: What kinds of clothing did you wear? Women were wearing very long skirts at that time, weren't they?
- Field: We were wearing long skirts.
- Fry: You couldn't go out in shorts and a halter.
- Field: Oh my, no.
- Fry: This must have been very uncomfortable.
- Field: You would have been considered some kind of degenerate of the worst kind if you had done anything like that, and especially a minister's wife. No, I remember the clothes came to about the ankles and were light. My trousseau consisted almost entirely of light clothes except the few heavier ones that I had needed for the ship coming across. All those I was instructed to give away immediately to some other missionary going home that could wear my size, which was very small then. And I immediately gave all the heavy clothes away because you had no use for them over there.
- Fry: It sounds like you couldn't have kept them anyway.
- Field: When I had to go home, I remember that some missionary donated something or other to keep me warm.
- Fry: So these clothes just continued to cross the Atlantic, I suppose--
- Field: Oh, yes.
- Fry: --making an indeterminate number of trips.
- Field: I want to tell you, my dear friend, that there was far less consciousness, it seems to me, of the body than there is now. There wasn't so much emphasis on fashion. Of course, you had to look neat, and I, being young, had wanted my clothes as à la mode as possible. But people wore all kinds of different fashions because the English people particularly were extremely independent at that time. And I found them--even in England when I was there, I never saw such individualities on the street. It didn't seem the conformity that you find in America, where every woman has every hair in place and [inaudible].
- Fry: And all the clothes in a given year look alike?

- Field: --all the clothes in a given year look alike. No. It was all very different.
- Fry: Was this also true in Detroit at that time, that there was more individuality in dress than there is now?
- Field: In general I would think so, though probably not as much so as I saw in England and in the Orient. We girls, I remember, all liked to look pretty [much] the way the other girls did as far as possible. But there wasn't as much of life given to this as it seems to me there is now. One was really interested in far more exciting and--
- Fry: Esoteric things?
- Field: Yes.

Social Life in Burma and Household Staff

- Fry: That certainly is my impression to, and I suppose in Rangoon you probably ran around with what? Other missionaries and also the British officers and wives?
- Field: Ran around with them or--?
- Fry: Socially.
- Field: Socially, oh yes indeed. Even the American missionaries, and especially a minister, because as I reminded you my husband was a pastor of the Rangoon Eurasian Church. And even they were given their place in society. You know how regimented all English society is, so that if there's a reception given by the governor general people are received in the order of their importance. I assure you we weren't very high in the line, but we had a place somewhere in there.
- Fry: At least you existed in the social structure.
- Field: And the governor general's wife came to call on me, which was a mark of the fact that I was a member of--
- Fry: You were in the Four Hundred?
- Field: Yes, this group. Then we in time were supposed to go there and return the call and just leave our cards. That was all, because you couldn't receive, naturally, every and any all of

- Field: the time. I don't remember feeling that we were in any way made to feel like outcasts or strangers or--
- Fry: You mean in the English-speaking society there?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: Was this pretty small in Rangoon at that time?
- Field: At that time it wasn't. Well, I wouldn't say English-speaking because there were plenty of English officers and plenty of English officials there, and their wives, but Americans--if you want to put it that way--there were very few Americans there. We were looked upon as interesting because we spoke differently. We didn't have the delightful English accent, at least what I think is delightful. They thought our manner of speech was quaint.
- Fry: Especially when you're from the wild west of Detroit.
- Field: I remember one man explaining to me that every American had a nasal tone in his voice, and he thought it was from the American Indians that we first encountered on coming from England.
- Fry: Those Indian dialects just ruined us!
- Field: Yes, they just ruined us because of their nasal tone.
- Fry: Did you tell him that we didn't bother to speak to Indians, we only shot them?
- Field: No, I didn't.
- Fry: This might have ruined your argument for better treatment of [East] Indians.
- Field: I had learned by that time to be very deferential to any opinion that an Englishman gave. I had very nice relations with the English people over there. It was probably due to the Tillys, for one thing.

There was also a young clergyman of the English church, the Anglican Church. He was only a young curate, and he had just recently come out. And I happened to look like the girl he was going to marry but who was for some reason still in England and would be brought out later, maybe when his position as curate became a little more remunerative than it was. And he used to like to come in for tea in the afternoon as often as he could and talk to me about this young thing in England

Field: and how I reminded him of her. One afternoon he came in very late. And I said to him, "Well, you won't want tea this afternoon, of course. You've been around making calls on all your parishoners."

And he said, "Oh, indeed I will. I've only had twelve cups. I must have my thirteenth here." That is an indication of how the British kept up their customs. They clung to them with a persistence that was almost phenomenal in the face of the conditions of the climate.

Fry: Yes. How did they drink hot tea in a climate like that?

Field: Oh well, I'll have to say it was a hot drink that cooled you off more in the end if you were willing to go through the first phases of feeling hot. In the end it cooled you more.

Fry: Oh, is that right. Goodness!

Field: Of course, they also drank a great deal of ale, especially the English officers and their wives, and that was cooling.

The chairs were so indicative of the life of leisure that they lived, and it seemed to me that they had a great deal of leisure. They were lounging chairs with wide arms to them and made of wicker, strongly woven. And in the arm of every chair was a round hole left in which the glass could be put down.

Fry: This was British?

Field: Yes.

Fry: What sort of roof did your house have? Thatched?

Field: No. It was made--no, those were the things I didn't observe too well--as I remember the roof, it had to be very sloping because of the terrific rains, and I think it was made of what we call shingles, but probably shingles of teakwood. It would have to be very thinly cut but--of that durability because of not only the fact that I've spoken of of the way the lighter woods were eaten, but also the rain, the heavy rains would necessitate a very good and solid roof.

Fry: That's what I was thinking. You mentioned, too, your various helpers in the house. Could you give a rundown of what your staff consisted of?

Field: It bothers me greatly that I can't remember the Burmese names of them, but I can tell you what the staff consisted of. And I want

Field: to remind you that the whole group of them didn't cost as much as one servant, even at that time, in this country, and at that time, a servant got five dollars a week over here. And all of these got paid a few rupees.

I will tell you who they were. There was the cook. He was always sort of a boss, and while they came from the lower caste, even in the lower caste they had their gradations. The cook had a little more education. He had to know more. And he had a kind of sense of respectability that so many of the Sudra class didn't have. They all seemed beaten down by the fact that they were the Untouchables.

Then besides the cook, he had a paniwallah. That is one of the few Burmese names that comes back to me. He was the water boy. I ought to tell you what his duties were, which means describing the way we bathed. There were no bathtubs. There was a room, a bathroom with a floor that had a metal base, and that was perforated so that water could pass through it. And it was also edged with strong planks of teakwood so that you stepped over into this and you were in the bath. And beside you would be a great jar of water, a very big one that would hold many gallons and a dipper. And you dipped from this jar and with soap and whatever else you could find to use, like a facecloth. You bathed yourself the best you could but there was no such thing as getting into a nice comfortable bath. Well, the paniwallah was kept busy because that jar had to be kept full, and the cook's jars for cooking had to be kept full.

Fry: He was the plumbing system?

Field: He was the plumbing system of Burma, yes, he was, or at least he was the official of the plumbing system. He got the water from wells. They would be varying distances. I think our paniwallah's well was not--of course, you see, he was not only my paniwallah but he was shared by all the people that were on this particular compound, as it was called. So there was a well for that compound. I can't tell you how far some of them must have had to go. But he would carry on his back a waterbag, and of course they learned to carry things in the most extraordinary way. The things they can carry on their heads they carry in a way that makes you stand in awe because some of them are heavy things they carry. But the waterbags were slung over their shoulders, and the bags were made of rubber, I presume. And in those would be a good quantity of water. And he had to make many visits back and forth to the well to fill these jars.

Then as I remember it, the paniwallah was also responsible for keeping these little lamps that I spoke of filled with

Field: coconut oil that hung in our closets.

Then we had a sweeper woman. She came in every single day because the dust was--

Fry: It must have been very great.

Field: Very great over there. She had a native robe made of a bunch of fibers, stiff fibers, tied together, and I think her cleaning was pretty sketchy, but at least she came in every day and did that.

You must remember that you lost caste with these people who worked for you if you tried to do anything yourself. I was so discouraged one day with the superficiality with which the sweeping had been done that I decided to try to do a little myself, housework, and was warned that I must never do that again, that I wouldn't get any service. They wouldn't come to me at all because their mama, as they call him--mama is the name for teacher or boss over in Burma. So I who was eighteen was addressed by my gray-headed cook as "Mama, what do you eat today?" So I learned soon that I wasn't allowed to do the housework. And that is why when white people come back from the Orient they find it very hard to adjust to servant conditions over here again.

Fry: Yes, I've found that's true in the diplomatic corps, too.

Field: Did you?

Fry: Our friends there had a terrible time when they come back to the United States.

Field: Oh, my niece, who was foreign correspondent for the Herald Tribune for five years over there, and had nothing domestic to do, almost went crazy in order to carry on her work over here when she came back, and had to have her little boy taken care of, and all that. It was really horrible.

Then we had also a person who probably would be called a valet over here, who kept my husband's shoes shined, who brushed his clothes, and generally looked after his wardrobe. I don't remember that I had a maid, but I do remember that he would also shine my shoes. Then we had a--what shall I call him?--a kind of go-between boy that ran errands for us, looked after getting the mail and taking the mail.

And it seems to me this was all--though when I was over there I felt as though I had a legion.

Fry: Yes, you must have. You did have a legion.

Field: Of course, after my little boy was born (which is another story to be told later) I had an ayah, the Indian nurse, and they're wonderful. They have a very strong maternal instinct and the fact that women aren't supposed to do very much else than bear and take care of their children and cook for their husbands gives them in India a very loving touch. Anyway, I felt she was able to handle a baby in a way that pleased me very much.

Fry: Oh, that's wonderful.

Field: I who was so ignorant, I knew nothing.

Food and Health

Fry: Yes, I'm wondering too how you adjusted to the food and the general health conditions there?

Field: That was hard for me because I have never liked very hot foods-- I mean "hot" in the sense of spiced. And I suppose there's something in the climate that calls for that because all the food over there is more or less of that nature. Of course a good curry made by an excellent cook is delicately flavored but it is still spiced. And curry is something--or was something--so foreign to my provincial menu at home that I really took weeks to get used to it. And eat it you had to, because curries appear on all hands. There's a different mixture of curry for everything. There's a fish curry--

Fry: That's what I understand, and we haven't caught on to that yet in the United States.

Field: Not at all, and now I can make as good curry as anybody, but I don't do it very often because it takes so long. A good curry is not just throwing some curry powder into some soup that you have made and think you can have a chicken curry. Not at all. It's a matter of combining many--

Fry: Many spices?

Field: As I started to say, there's a fish curry, there's a vegetable curry, there's a chicken curry, there's a meat curry that's other than chicken, and then there's a plain rice curry.

Fry: Yes. Well, of course, the good Buddhists didn't. They are all vegetarians in India and Burma, too, and everywhere that either Hinduism or Buddhism prevailed you'd find vegetarians.

Field: But there were white people over there--the cooks had to learn to cook for them, though I think they themselves never touched it. So there was meat. Now, I was too young to discover where these things came from, and where that meat came from I don't know. We didn't have it very often. We lived pretty much, as far as meat went, on chicken. Chicken was everywhere. Everyone raised chickens.

Fry: It was? Oh, this was permitted then?

Field: Yes, this was permitted. There were chicken farms and individual chicken raisers, not of course right in the heart of the city. There wouldn't have been any room for food for them, and they let chickens eat a good deal of the natural growth in places where they had little areas that were not built on. And I've told you that the fertility of Burma is such that there were all kinds of grasses and edible things.

Fry: Any of them would grow?

Field: Yes, and I have a feeling, as I look back, that our vitamins must have come a good deal from the chicken food because they did get a lot of greens.

Fry: Natural foods?

Field: Yes. But even with that the whites more or less suffered from vitamin lack. That's why the children of white people are never allowed to stay in India during their childhood. They are sent back at a certain age, determined, I suppose, by their condition. They're sent back to schools in England, and their parents get leaves and go home to see them.

But the white children of the Orient are pretty well unacquainted with their parents, I would say. There's a great deal of separation. If they're girls they're brought out at eighteen, and of course brought out to be married.

Fry: You mean brought out to Burma?

Field: To Burma they were, yes. I don't know whether that was true in India or not but certainly they were in Burma.

Fry: Like this Nina.

Field: Nina Tilly, yes.

Fry: Well, was the water often a disease carrier?

Field: Oh yes indeed it was. We boiled every single drop of water that we drank.

Fry: It must have been a job in that heat.

Field: It was. Of course, the cook did it and cooled it off. We had no ice but they had means of knowing how to bury cans of the boiled water in the cooler parts of the earth. So at least we didn't drink it hot.

Fry: It wasn't as hot as the atmosphere then.

Field: No, but it never tasted very good.

Fry: Let's see, were you there during the rainy season, in Rangoon?

Field: Oh, yes.

Fry: I had read that the cholera epidemics always started right after that because the rains let everything wash into the wells.

Field: That was true. Cholera epidemics were kept down better in Burma and in the cities than they were in India proper. In India proper they died of cholera like flies. There weren't so many deaths in Burma. The country itself is a healthier land generally because of its noncrowded population. They don't crowd together as much.

Fry: I see. What did you do during the cholera epidemic? Stay inside?

Field: We were given shots even then.

Fry: Oh, you were?

Field: Yes. We had had to take cholera shots before we left. In England we had to have them.

Fry: Were these given to the natives too?

Field: I don't know whether they were or not. I can't remember whether they were given to the natives or whether they had a lot of the materials at that time or not. But of course this is one of the reasons why the children were sent away, this great fear of the children getting it.

Fry: These shots weren't real guarantees against it, I guess?

Field: No, medicine hadn't been brought up to the state it is now by any manner or means. It was only because Burma was by all its

- Field: natural conditions a healthier country that we didn't see so much of, you might say, wholesale death as they saw in India.
- Fry: The medicine as practiced in Rangoon was more on the order of English medicine, I gather?
- Field: Yes, it was.
- Fry: Or was it English medicine?
- Field: Oh yes, it came out from England, I presume, and again this is a presumption on my part because I was really too young to know how to investigate these things, and very soon became too preoccupied with pregnancy and the results of it, which were very sad, to be able to learn firsthand all the things that now were going over there that I would be interested in doing. I had no education even here in the way to do research, nor was I, I'm afraid--
- Fry: And we hadn't invented lower-class, middle-class and upper-class terminology?
- Field: No, no.
- Fry: You couldn't do a Middletown Burma study.

New Skills, New Understanding

- Field: And also, you see, I had all this new life, to learn how to direct all these servants. My mother had had a maid, certainly at times when my father's fortunes seemed to allow it. We were never allowed to ask our father why sometimes things changed in our house financially. Probably he had many ups and downs in investments. But the major part of my young life at home we had a maid whom Mother directed, and I didn't know anything about how to tell these people to do things or how you had to learn to be very strict with them, because I have to say that the natives would take advantage of a young white woman in the way of work, and they would loaf on the job or fail to do things well. I remember the paniwallah, I tell you, letting the oil run out of the lamps, and our having a very bad time about that. All this was an education in itself. It had to be learned.
- Fry: Yes indeed, for a little girl just out of high school, especially.
- Field: And then I think too I had a hard time adjusting to the food.

- Field: I ate as much as I could but I have never had a really strong digestive system, that persisted all through life. I found it hard to adjust to these spiced dishes.
- Fry: We've touched on a lot of really difficult inconveniences here, the accumulation of which is enough to make somebody want to turn tail and run back to Detroit, it seems to me.
- Field: All except the fact that, you see, you had the help. That, as you get used to knowing how to direct it or supervise it, is one of the great blessings. Probably if it wasn't for that, white people couldn't live there because you cannot do as much active work over there. But on the other hand it gave me much more time to get acquainted with the people and to read. I, too, found it difficult to adjust to the domestic situation, even though it hadn't become acute, when I came back. I found it hard to get a good maid in later, even in earlier times.
- Fry: You said that you read in Burma. Where did you get your books and what did you read?
- Field: Well, there was a library there, and I read books such as The Soul of a People. Incidentally, I met the author of that book, who was probably one of the best-informed men on Burma.
- Fry: Harold Fielding-Hall. Did you meet him in Burma?
- Field: Yes. He was a man who had gone over early and served in the army, and had literally fallen in love with the Burmese people. I think his heart was full of sadness at the British occupation. I think he felt the Burmese had been perfectly capable of carrying on in their own way, and made it so evident in this first book of his on The Soul of a People that evidently the British government was unhappy about it, and he wrote a second book called A People at School in which he showed the benefits that the British had given the Burmese.
- And they undoubtedly had. Life isn't ever one-sided. It always has its two opposites.
- Fry: What was he doing over there when you were there?
- Field: He was still--he was an officer in the--
- Fry: A British officer? Oh, yes.
- Field: But he was more or less retiring to write, and so he was given very simple, I think, responsibilities.
- Fry: I'm anxious to know about your husband's church.

Field: I'll tell you about that in another one.

Fry: We'll start that then for the next interview.

Field: All right. I'll think of that more. I'm sorry I hadn't thought about all these details for I was so concerned and thinking about what an impression Burma as a whole made on me, because in later life it was--

[end of interview]

VII NEW QUESTIONS AND NEW EXPERIENCES

[May 18, 1960]

Questions on Economics

Fry: In our last interview, Sara, we covered the conditions in Burma that you lived under when you were there. I was wondering if you could maybe tell something about how this affected your own life.

Field: Yes I can, but before I got into that specific matter I'd just like to here and now remind you that I was in my teens, I hadn't had a college education, and therefore I didn't know what to call various powerful reactions I got from the differing conditions in the Orient. I've spoken of the almost frightening sense of the inadequacy of the capitalist system that I felt without using those terms when I saw those great cargoes of foodstuff leaving India at a time when humans were dying by the thousands. That was later a very definite cause of my exploring the economic system and probably, eventually, of becoming a Socialist, as I did become. That is one thing and we've gone into it.

Questions on the Role of Women

The other was, you might call it, sociological because when we crossed the Bay of Bengal into Burma where conditions were favorable to the people there--I think I have said there were only eight million in Burma at the time when we lived there--and the ground was extremely fertile. And there seemed to be no evident poverty. There seemed to be no misery such as was ever present during the time that we spent in India. But what struck me very forcibly there was a changed conception about the Burmese women in regard to their freedom. I had expected to find all Oriental women very subservient and very meek as they were--are--

Field: in India, not so much today. But I'm talking about nearly a half a century ago.

There I found the most outstanding type of woman who was able to manage not only her household affairs with her husband's help, but who preferred to take charge of the economic affairs and would-- I think I have said--be in charge of the bazaars and I don't know what other forms of business because Burma was a very simple land in all forms of its organization. H. Fielding Hall speaks of the fact that they had been able to run their government with the greatest economy and with the smallest number of divisions before the English occupation.

And I think also their manner of earning their living was also a simple affair. There was, of course, agriculture in the northern and central parts, less in the southern where I lived because of the extreme heat there. But the women had no sense in any way, as I could see, of being of less importance than their husbands or than the male element in the country. And that, I would say, was the start of my interest in the sociological matters.

Questions on Religion

Then came the orthodoxy of a church, a Christian church in a Buddhist country where it was very hard for me to believe in the creed that these people had to become Christians to be good. They were already good. I saw almost nothing in Burma of cruelty or heard little of thieving or what in this modern age we call "gangsterism," surely not that. They seemed altogether a most happy people. And it seemed to me for us to go in--at least this is what came out of my contacts with them later--it seemed for us to go in there and try to make them feel guilty, a sense of sin which Buddha never emphasized, and the part of the country I was in was highly Buddhist, the worship centering around probably one of the greatest pagodas on earth, the Shwe Dagon pagoda. So I got a shock in orthodoxy, you might say, because I began to question the value of Christianity as it's taught in an orthodox church.

We had a very unhappy experience in regard to that. Did I tell you this before about the Tillys?

Fry: No, you've never told that in detail. You've just alluded to it parenthetically.

Field: Well, I have told you that coming over there were these fine

Field: people who really prepared me more than I can ever thank them enough for for life in Burma. They were of course members of the orthodox Church of England themselves. But out of their friendship for us they came to our church to hear my then husband preach, and it happened to be on a communion Sunday. Communion was held once a month. They stayed on for communion, or intended to. An usher was sent to them to tell them they couldn't take communion because they had not been baptized. That is to say, they hadn't been baptized according to the strict orthodox Baptist custom of dipping under the water.

I hadn't given the thought that I later gave to all of this but something in me rose in rebellion about this fact that these fine people who showed every virtue that the Christian religion could teach should be denied a communion with their Lord. And it ended in my having my first serious quarrel with my husband. I was so indignant that I could hardly talk coherently at first. We were many days before the effect of our difference wore somewhat off, at least on the surface.

It never wore off inside of me. From that day on I began to say, "What is this church I belong to? It seems to be as exclusive as the Roman Catholic Church which says it's the only true church." The Baptist may not say that, or the hard-shell Baptists even don't say it, but they do say that you are not really a Christian until you have been baptized in the manner that Jesus was, which was dipping under the water.

Fry: Total immersion.

Field: Yes, total immersion. The things I'm relating, of course, only came to me in what might be called unexplained shocks. Unexplained because I didn't know what I was really feeling so rebellious about or so impressed by, as in the case of freedom for women. And it took the later years of development and study and reading and constant thought before out of all this came a philosophy and a greater understanding.

Fry: You mean you didn't have a structured set of beliefs that these things could run up against and have an impact on, is that it?

Field: No, I didn't. I had gone into the Baptist Church under the emotional urge of a girl in her teens without really knowing what the Baptist Church stood for, and I certainly hadn't any idea, in this country of abundance and in my case of protection, of what it meant to be a part of a country so terribly poor as India, and so terribly rich as regarded a few English landholders and rajahs.

Field: I hadn't thought much, of course, about the freedom of women because here in America women were fairly free though they were barred from obtaining the equality in the vote, and that but, of course, had to come later. I'm sure it's one of the incentives that made me devote so much, sometimes at a good deal of sacrifice, to the cause of woman's suffrage in this country.

Then this matter of orthodoxy. I didn't know before that nobody could take communion except those who had had immersion. And the realization that that existed also broke on me with great force. I think I was a person who almost could have had traumas from these things if, instead of being traumas that led to neuroses in later life, they led to a great deal of what I consider was my education and development and perhaps without having run up against the extreme forms that I did of these things, I would never have given it the thought and almost the devotion of my life that I did.

Childbirth

Then of course there was also, you might say--if I say "shocked" it sounds as if it was something unpleasant. It wasn't. But I'd also not given very much thought to maternity. I had liked little children all right and that's fine, but when I became pregnant and realized I faced motherhood at that young age and so ill prepared in many ways, that was something of a physical shock. But when the birth was accomplished (1901), under great difficulties which harmed me in ways that have lasted all my life, I--

Fry: Could I ask you, were you able to have a doctor for the childbirth?

Field: Yes, but in the home, and the situation was very critical, although the child had been kept small, I guess because I was so small, that I had to diet. The doctor found herself giving out of chloroform before he was born, and I think became a little petrified, and taking him by forceps I was torn in a manner that was extremely grievous. It wasn't just a minor thing at all. It was so bad that they cabled to a doctor at Johns Hopkins who was going to make a trip to the Orient to ask him if he would come to Rangoon and do the surgery that was necessary. And he had at first said he would. Indeed, he was an ardent Christian himself and he would feel it right to help out the wife of a missionary.

But alas, when he got to Singapore he was suddenly called back by some emergency in his own family, and there was no doctor in all Burma, no surgeon in all Burma who was capable of dealing with the extreme condition, the bad condition I was in. So that

Field: was what, you see, eventually months and months later drove us home.

Well, in spite of the serious delivery or failure to make a good delivery I think the doctor, Fowler-Thompson (whose name just comes back to me now), had done the best she could. For me to have gained consciousness under conditions of such agony would probably have been a shock of another kind. And she in her effort to prevent this did the best she could, and I have no sense of guilt on her part, I mean I have no feeling of guilt about it, what she did. I think it was just the only choice.

Of course I was in a pretty bad state for a long time, and yet I can remember when the baby was first laid in my arms, it seemed almost as if he had a recognition immediately which I know the pediatricians and all the child psychologists would laugh about, but it seemed to be that we had a recognition of one another. Something passed between us, even in that tiny, newborn baby state, and myself that is indescribable. As near as I can come to it, it was like the ecstasy that I have read, that primitive people have sometimes had in giving birth to a child.

Fry: Well, there has been a lot of writing on that, Sara, recently, the communication that passes between newborn babies and their mothers in the holding of the baby.

Field: Really? I didn't even know.

Fry: They don't dare be mystic about it, of course, this is taboo, but there's something there.

Field: No, I don't want to be mystic but I want to report something honest and so deep that in all these many years it remains as one of the great experiences of my life. It seems to me that the experience has all the more validity, inasmuch as I was in a pretty painful state. And when the baby was laid in my arms--or rather let me say that before he was laid in my arms I was almost afraid because I knew my inexperience and wondered if I, lying flat on my back in bed and in a good deal of suffering, I would be able to hold him right. But somehow the exact rightness of it was there. And he was put into my arms and I drew him to me. And the belief will live with me to the day of my death that we looked at each other, though I know focussing is something that is supposed to come a good deal later with a baby. We knew each other in a way that proved all through his short young life--for, as you will later hear, he was killed at seventeen in an auto accident--it lived with us both, a sense of closeness which we didn't try to analyze and which of course I hope I would have been wise enough to have minimized as he grew

Field: toward the age when he would have to have the lover and wife come into his life. But I do want to record this because it was a fact, and as Aldous Huxley quoted the other night, I believe with him the mystics have the facts and the scientists the fear. I leave it to the scientists now to--

Fry: To tell why?

Field: --to tell these facts.

Young Mother

Fry: Let me ask you this. You were saying how completely inexperienced you were regarding little babies, and here you were isolated in Burma with this. Now, how did you know--did you have any improvement of this feeling when he was born?

Field: Oh yes, it grew, it grew gradually. I can't say I was a super-wise mother but the love that I felt for the little fellow was a guide, and though I couldn't nurse him long because of the dreadful caking of the milk in one breast--and it had to be operated on--I think that even in giving him the bottle, which I never allowed the ayah (or Indian nurse) that came later, to do, I think even that in that it came near to almost being like giving of the mother's breasts to the child.

Fry: You always held him for this?

Field: I always held him for this. And there was no nonsense written then about not picking babies up when they cry. I think I realized that I myself was flung out into a wide world of which I was ignorant hundreds, thousands of miles from my parents, and meeting these experiences I have related. And I felt even more so that the little child is flung out into a world in which he is utterly helpless. And I had an intuition that when he cried he cried because of need and shouldn't be rejected. So I fortunately escaped with him the modern, or rather the books that were modern about twenty years ago when my daughter was having her babies and couldn't pick them up and couldn't cuddle them and couldn't in any way show her maternal feeling for the child. I'm glad of that.

Fry: While this was going on, now your husband still had his church, didn't he, and was running that?

Field: Oh, yes.

Fry: I was wondering how close he was to the baby and how he felt

Fry: about young Albert.

Field: Oh, he had the father's proud feeling of having a son, and I'm sure he loved the little fellow as much as it was possible for his nature, which was not a very loving one, and was good to him. But it was something utterly different from the feeling that I had.

Of course, very soon I had to leave this hot climate or die because the lacerations were such that they brought on a constant diarrhea, and the heat was making it worse.

Fry: Could you leave the house or go about or did this interfere with all your activities?

Field: No, it interfered with everything. I was in a perfectly helpless condition. I was like a baby that had to have protection against elimination. And I was very weak. Probably that is why the milk gave out right away, but I was so persistent in trying to nurse Albert that the breasts caked and I had to be operated on and have a tube put through them to relieve the dreadful pain and also the danger of it.

Fry: Now this was done in Rangoon?

Field: Yes. The doctor I had--

Fry: Dr. Thompson?

Field: Wait a minute, did I speak of that, that Dr. Kelley?

Fry: No.

Field: In the meantime, every surgeon that was within a near enough distance to examine me refused to even attempt an operation, saying that it was too intricate and that the stitches wouldn't hold in the heat. So we cabled to Dr. Kelley, a gynecologist of Johns Hopkins University. He cabled back saying that he would be very glad to take care of me but that he would not arrive in Burma until such-and-such a date, that he advised I be taken out of the heat in the meantime and being built up because of the gravity of the situation.

Consequently, we found that the Church of England had a place up in northern Burma.

[end of interview]

VIII THE EXPERIENCE OF BURMA DEEPENS

[May 27, 1960]

Up to Northern Burma

Fry: So your doctor in Burma felt it would be best for you to go up to northern Burma or some place where you could get out of the heat and try to build yourself up physically for future surgery?

Field: Yes. I think at that time Dr. Fowler-Thompson, who was the physician who took care of me at the birth of my son, had consulted with other doctors in Burma and decided that operation was not possible there. So I think they already knew at that time that there was nothing for it but for me to go back to America to have so serious an operation performed.

Fry: Oh. So ultimately you were to go to America--they knew this?

Field: They knew it. They didn't tell us though, at the time. They knew I could not go in the state I was in. They thought that the cooler weather of the mountainous region of northern Burma would do me some good and prepare me for the long trip home. The voyage was a long one in those days. It was five or six weeks before one could reach my home in Detroit where I would go, back to my parents.

I went up to northern Burma a most ignorant girl, not knowing what my condition was and not knowing anything about the care and feeding of my child. Of course a great deal of that comes to us, thank God, by instinct, and I took with me an ayah, the same ayah I had had when I was in Rangoon. Also my husband went up to establish me there and would have stayed but could not on account of church duties. So he had to return.

I would like to tell you something of that trip because it was an exceedingly interesting one. To do so I must speak of the wonderful Irrawaddy River. If the Burmese were not Buddhists

Field:

as they are but were Hindus, I think they would worship that Irrawaddy River in the same way that the Hindus worship the Ganges. For it has a power and strength to it in its best times--by best times, I mean in flood times and just after flood time--that the Ganges possesses.

It runs through the entire length of Burma. It still was, perhaps is yet, I have not been able to look up the last word on this, a mystery as to exactly where it rose. They think it was a confluence of two rivers, but they were not certain then. It begins with a course, as so many rivers do, a narrow little stream that increases and increases as tributaries come into it. And at one place about the central part of Burma, it narrows down because of the great rocks to something like fifty yards, although in its full width it is something like one hundred and fifty to two hundred yards wide. At this narrow width in flood time it overflows the whole land. But this is good because it soaks the paddy fields and it's one of the reason why Burma is so fertile and has such a plentiful supply of food.

Well, this was not flood tide or the [period] after flood tide. It was the hot weather when the river was beginning to shrink. We could not go all the way up to this place that I had been assigned by the Church of England authorities, which was called Bhamo, by water. I mean we could not go all the way up from Rangoon to Bhamo by river as it possibly could have been done when the flood is somewhat abated, so that that narrow portion could be traversed by smaller boats. But we went as far as Mandalay by launch. This was one of my most colorful experiences, many details of which would have been more impressed on my mind had my health not been so precarious and had my responsibilities for a child, a little child, only a few weeks old, not been so great.

But I do remember that the ship was a little unpleasant because it was loaded with fruit, whose name escapes me, I'm sure it will come later, many things do--durian, coming now, durian. The natives love it and it is produced in great profusion, but it has the most dreadful odor that one can imagine. And on this launch that we took up to Mandalay which was crowded with native Burmese as well as some whites, there was also a great load of durian. And the trip was less observable by me because of my having to lean over the rail a good deal of the way out, made very ill by the odor of this fruit.

But I still do remember the excitement of passing by towns whose names were unknown to me and unpronounceable and getting it all, as you do in the Orient, that sense of vivid color flowing along the banks and really in the river too, because I

Field: should say that the Irrawaddy is the really great highway of Burma. We hear much now about the Burma Road which is in north Burma and was used of course in World War II as the great source of supply to our allied troops in China. That was not in existence when I was in Burma, so that the Irrawaddy was really the one great highway and in its useable months was crowded with boats of every description: launches for passengers, boats for fishing, boats for cargo, all so different, all shaped in different ways.

Fry: No mass production to make them all look alike?

Field: Not at all, a great deal of individuality in everything.

Well, after Mandalay, we could take a train and we did take a train from there to Bhamo. I don't remember the exact distance. It seemed to me we were on the train forever, for they weren't fast trains, and they were neither bad nor good. They were just passable. And all this time, of course, the difficulty of sterilizing the baby's bottles and food became almost a major event so that I was kept from [inaudible], because, as I say, I could not take in as much of the life beyond myself and my child and our needs as I would like now to think I had seen and remembered.

Rigors of Life in Bhamo

We got to Bhamo and found a little old cottage which had been loaned to us so kindly, of course, through the Tillys who I have mentioned before as being our good angels all the time we were in Burma.

Fry: Was this in the mountains?

Field: Yes. There was a little strip connecting Bhamo, which is on the extreme eastern shore of Burma, with a portion of China, just which portion I cannot now recall. I'll try to find that out. But across this gorge had been built a bridge. I believe that French and English and other (German, probably) engineers had all made a bid to build it, but the American engineers had gotten the job. And we walked a portion of the way across that bridge but it made me too dizzy to go very far because it was one of the most extraordinary features of engineering due to the fact that its trestle work rested on the roof of another gorge which lay under the gorge that this bridge spanned. So looking down you looked past the walls of the gorge that the bridge spanned and down, down, down, as it were, so that it

- Field: seemed as if it were almost bottomless.
- Fry: In other words, this was a wider gorge which rested on a narrower one.
- Field: No, it's the other way around. This was a narrower gorge resting on a wider gorge. Otherwise they couldn't have put the trestle work in on that gorge.
- Fry: Oh, I thought you meant a ledge done there.
- Field: No, it's very hard to get the picture because, of course--
- Fry: It sounds a little upside down.
- Field: Yes. But it's famous today as I think one of the greatest feats in bridge engineering that has ever been done. I was young enough and foolishly patriotic enough to rejoice that it was American engineers that had built it, and felt a great warmth of heart when I saw the initials of some of them with the place they had come from: Schenectady, New York, or Grand Rapids, Michigan, all different places in the United States. They had put their initials and names, too, and names of places, too.
- Fry: You found this way up there in north Burma!
- Field: Yes. I cannot tell you the beauty of that semitropical country in this cool land. The wildflowers were profuse all around in the fields. And the trees, many of which were utterly unfamiliar to me, were in gorgeous bloom, so that I rejoiced greatly in that even though, as I say, my preoccupations were such that much of this exterior world has slipped from me because I was living so intently in the life of a mother.

Well, our baby and I too responded to the cooler climate, though of course there couldn't be any complete upbuilding while I was in the condition I was. And the baby seemed, if not to grow fat, at least he lived and to a certain extent thrived. It seemed sometimes it was as much by a kind of a sort of spiritual power in that child that was already developing a will to live.

We ran out of food for ourselves at one time and had to eat sour rice. I will never forget the will it took on my part to make myself eat at all under those circumstances. But I realize, looking back, that among the great many blessings that this brief period in the Orient taught me was to be able to endure a certain amount of austerity and to make the best of limitations, which were very great up there.

Field: Finally, an Englishman who lived many miles away but who had been told by the Tillys that we were in this country drove over with his horse and buggy and brought us some very delicious things, as I remember. We had run out of tea, which is nothing short of a minor tragedy in Burma where one, it seems to me, needs the stimulus of that delicious drink. And he brought us some fine tea and was horrified to think that this sour rice had been the last bit of our food. He said he would come over with another load, which he did do. And I found out later that he was a suitor for the hand of the Tillys' beautiful daughter whom they were bringing out from an English school, and that he was glad to do any service to friends of the Tillys.

My ayah was a very great comfort to me. She too had no book learning about scientific care of a child any more than I did but she had an age-old wisdom that stood us in good part. She, of course, hadn't known anything about sterilization. Probably that had been unnecessary in a country where every mother, no matter how thin she was nor how many children she had, nursed her child. So I always had a little trouble with her to be sure that she would do what I asked her to do about boiling the nipples and the bottles when I wasn't looking, because she didn't see any sense in it. She didn't understand what we were boiling them for. A microbe didn't exist for her and germs were unknown.

We stayed there several weeks, and as I was still losing weight and had gotten down to less than ninety pounds, my husband (to whom I wrote, of course, letters) wrote me to get ready to return, that he was coming up to get me.

Fry: He had had to return to his church?

Field: Oh, yes, I had said that. His church duties had taken him home. When he came up he told me with a great deal of bitter disappointment, because of course he had hoped to give his life to this missionary work, that the doctors had told him that under the circumstances I must get back to America as soon as possible. By this time it was, I think, late November and I found on arriving in Rangoon that my husband had already made all the arrangements for our voyage and for our leaving.

Missionaries over there leave all their furniture for the person who is next to occupy the bungalow so that we hadn't any of the burden of taking care of furniture. And our preparations were made quite speedily, and we left. We'd been about two years in all in Burma and India, a few weeks only in India.

"Many Forms of Awakening"

Field: It seems to me that this time would be good to summarize my many forms of awakening in that country, despite the physical strain I was under.

Fry: Yes, it seems you had a lot of influences in several directions working on you here. It must have wrought some kind of changes.

Field: Oh, they had. They had wrought many changes. I'm sure I had matured far beyond what the length of time would ordinarily have allowed me to. The exposure to such foreign countries, the sense of inequality that exists in a world where the privileged had too much and the unprivileged far too little, had become very intense in my thought. I do not mean to say that with all these changes in my individual life they all came to me then at once. I simply see that when I arrived home I had brought with me these changes, so deep that I never again could feel that I could live a purely individual life. My outreach to what little a human being can do in a world for others had already been stirred into action. And I think from the time that I was well enough to take part in any activities it began to show. That was in that field.

Then, of course, there was the awakening to, a great questioning of orthodoxy in religion. I was no longer the parrot like unconscious follower, you might say (I say "unconscious" because I never thought it out) of the faith that my husband possessed and into which I had been, at the age of something like eleven or twelve, baptized.

There was also the awakening to the sense of what freedom can do for people, how well-fed people can live more happily and more normally than I felt the people of India did.

Fry: You mean that you found that the people of Burma had more freedom than the people of India?

Field: Oh yes, yes indeed. The people of India are still bound by much convention and custom, especially the women. The women, you know, never sit down to the table with their husbands and family. They wait until they are all through to eat, so that they can serve them. That isn't true in Burma. None of those customs that seem like servility to an American-born woman exist in Burma. This, too, I think had pointed part of the direction that my life was to take in future years.

Field: Then, as I say, there had been this question of orthodoxy, and while I continued for some years to go to church and seemingly follow the line that a minister's wife should take, inwardly I was not in tune with it, and eventually this sense of living a double life was going to show in a complete break with my husband, but that was not to be for some years.

Fry: This question of orthodoxy right at this time, at the end of your visit, amounted to your disillusionment with church practices of exclusion, of--go ahead.

Field: Of course that awakening came in what you might call a very superficial way. It wasn't then a deep questioning into the theological aspects of orthodoxy. It was just a revolt from the results, so far as I had seen them in their treatment of people who I felt had lived or were living a far more generous and kind life than I was.

Fry: The Burmese people?

Field: No, the Tillys, who had been excluded from communion in our church and who had been quietly asked to go, as only the people who had been dipped under water could do it [accept communion]. And that seemed to me appalling. But of course it was like taking a little tiny section out of the wholeness of the theological revolt that I was to later experience. But it began--it was started, as it were.

I was sitting on a whole nest of eggs of experience then, and this was so startling that as a hen who is frightened flies off the nest, I didn't go back to sit on them until they had hatched into full-fledged knowledge. That was to come much later, but it was the beginning. I can't emphasize that enough. I think few young people in their lives, especially a girl who had wanted to go to college and didn't get to college, have such a chance for awakening experiences outside of books, outside of the academic world, and I think that perhaps it's why so many people have said to me, "Why, I have learned as much from you about certain things as I have from any college-bred person."

Fry: You didn't have to learn yours through the back door?

Field: No, I didn't. I was taught by these vivid experiences which cut deep grooves into me so that with the kind of mentality that I have they had to be later brought out in relation to their wholeness. I couldn't just say, "This is dreadful that the people of India are starving while food is being exported from their shores, and we in America are living in superfluity." I

- Field: couldn't just go on saying that and solve anything. I had to look into the whole economic question.
- Fry: Yes. So a little girl who came from a Baptist, protected, well-ordered environment in Detroit suddenly saw all these ambiguities in almost every realm of life?
- Field: You're absolutely right. That is what it was.
- Fry: And because it was a deep personal experience, it cut deep?
- Field: Yes, and it was a highly impressionable time of my life by right of age, you might say, being so young, and by right of the new personal experiences that I was having, they all had made me, it seems to me, extra-sensitive to whatever else happened that seemed important. In other words, I moved out, I think, into the identification with peoples-at-large such as I had never had before.

Buddhism

- Fry: I wonder what you found? Did you find anything at all in the religion of the Burmese that influenced you?
- Field: Oh yes, indeed I did. They had, for instance, a great happiness, not believing in any hell, or that there was anything about the afterlife except reincarnation, the need to return to the earth again for more schooling until perfect enlightenment came. I saw that it created in the mind a cheerfulness and a real sense of love of life that I don't feel we have here in the West.

The adoration of Buddha is so amazing. All the more so that they quite frankly, except in the case of a few monks, realize that they won't attain to that full enlightenment, in which they'll never have to return to earth, that Buddha did. They can only hope to move slowly through the eons toward it, as Buddha himself had, becoming bodhisattva, which is the step toward being a Buddha, which means the enlightened one, you know. And finally, through renouncing everything in this world as relative and giving himself up only to the idea of the absolute and of a knowledge of what holds us, brings us back to endure all the sufferings of earth, so that we keep on this wheel of life, which was his own individual addition, I think, to religious thinking and which he is supposed to have gotten in those hours of meditation under the bo tree, you remember, in India, from which Buddhism as well as Hinduism has come.

Field: I used to go as often as I could to the Shwe Dagon pagoda, which is built up in tiers up to finally a peak. There is a lotus bud at the top which is always kept covered with gold leaf. When the rains wear it off it's repaired. There's never any allowance of a Shwe Dagon pagoda's decay. They take care of it in a way that the Chinese people didn't take care of--I don't know why--their temples. But the Shwe Dagon is supposed to be built over one or three levels and is the most beautiful and the most important temple.

Fry: Is this in Rangoon?

Field: Right in Rangoon, on the outskirts of Rangoon. And as you come up the portion of the Irrawaddy River that empties--you see, the water empties into the Bay of Bengal and there's a little gulf, a little Gulf of Martaban on which Rangoon is really situated. You go up that and the Irrawaddy River meets it; off it there's a little fork that runs into the Bay of Martaban, the Gulf of Martaban. As you come up that last portion of the river you see the Shwe Dagon gleaming in the sunlight. It's very beautiful.

Fry: That's one of the first things you see, then?

Field: Yes.

Fry: Did Albert ever go to these pagodas?

Field: He went as a sightseer, yes, he did. But I think even then I went with something more than mere curiosity. I think I went in the later visits that I made there with a growing sense of the beauty of Buddhist character. For, you see, while very little if anything was ever written down about Christ until about a hundred years after his death, if there was such a person as Christ which, as you know, some scholars doubt--they think it was a reflection of Buddha in terms of a Semitic mind or minds. But his [Buddha's] character was very beautiful. You see, he came to the place where he renounced his palace and his joys and his little son and all to go out and seek in his great compassion a relief from return to this world which he felt was one of sorrow and pain.

Now the Burmese seemed to not feel so much that the sorrow and pain, though they must have [inaudible]. I think perhaps Buddha, being an Indian, may have been saddened by the conditions in India to a greater degree than the Burmese have to be. He saw--although the parents tried to keep him within the bounds of the palace grounds, he escaped and he saw these sights of illness and old age and death. And they were impressed on his mind as they are impressed on all minds in India more deeply than we

- Field: feel in countries where the people have care, plenty to eat, and they're not in as an emaciated condition. I think very likely that influenced very deeply Buddha's feeling about the quality of life on earth. He knew that there were millions that didn't want to return and yet didn't know the way not to, and he went out to seek the way, and under the Bo tree had those great moments of enlightenment in which he saw that our desires are what hold us to life, and they pull us back to life, and that once we lose all desire, become completely free from it, we will not have to return.
- Fry: Yes, and it's losing of desire we were talking about.
- Field: Yes, this losing of desire.
- Fry: Well now, the Burmese comfortable, happy acceptance of nature they had--
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: --was a sort of living of this idea of losing desire, is that what you felt when you were there or did this make any difference?
- Field: I think they felt, as indeed H. Fielding-Hall, who wrote that very sensitive understanding book, The Soul of a People, said that they weren't in any hurry to lose the desire because life wasn't so sad for them and wretched, and they were willing to take the penalty of returning to earth again and again, so you didn't feel they were striving too hard, I mean, to lose all desire. They were rich in nature, these people, and in some ways life was so expansive despite its ills that they were willing to take another try at it.
- Fry: Yes, they didn't mind, and I think in India when Buddha or Gautama was growing up in India they didn't want to return to earth and live through another life?
- Field: Oh no, no, they did not, and I think it accounts for the enormous following he had for a time in India. Now, except in south India, of course, Buddhism has really left the land and gone up--its missionaries went up, pushed into China. And we know how it spread all through China and up in its own way into Japan. And so it had its great field there, whereas India today, except for south India, it's practically all Hindu with its various sects.
- Fry: Did you feel that this religion was perhaps less demanding than the Christian Baptist religion?

Field: Oh, you can't even make a comparison, it's so different.

Fry: It allowed the human beings to live more as they felt they should be than the Baptist?

Field: Yes. It didn't talk about sin. It would talk about Buddha, it was always the losing of desires, which as I have said, they weren't particularly in a hurry to do. H. Fielding-Hall points that out very clearly, that when a person whom one can call an avatar or teacher of great significance--who is to move for generations many, many people, influence them deeply--comes to earth, he is always a far more spiritually advanced person than the average even disciple.

So while they can [inaudible] a person, now let's say, who is a Christian can believe that you should sell all that you have and give to the poor. They make all kinds of compromises. They don't do it. The Christians don't do it. In that admonition that Jesus gave the young man who came and asked him, "How can I be saved?" Jesus was practically saying what Buddha did, "Give up all desire," but in those terms. So Buddha in his life of perfection completely without any desire for anything except the enlightenment which he himself had received to be given to his fellow man, was just as far ahead of the average Buddhist as Christ is from us, the average Christian. We would like to be like him but we are not, we are not true to that life.

Fry: And the Buddhist follower doesn't have to live with the prospects of having sin for not following--?

Field: No!

Fry: --he simply postponed his reaching Nirvana?

Field: Yes. And meanwhile gives his devotion and worship to the Buddha almost as to an abstract idea of full enlightenment, although they love the character of Buddha, and well they may.

And meanwhile, though he gives his worship to him, he knows, just as a Christian who might go to church and worship knows, that he can't ever attain that perfection without going through very many changes. Now a Christian seems to believe that he can do it by confessing his sins and just believing in Jesus because he was so perfect. But the Burmese don't let themselves off as easily as that. There's no permanent heaven with them, you see, when they die. I don't know what their beliefs are about the hereafter--between incarnations, maybe whether the soul sleeps or what, but they certainly are not afraid of it, and not like

- Field: the Catholics with their belief in purgatory and hell, and even the awful belief that souls are lost forever. Oh, no soul is ever lost in Buddhist ideas. And when they go to the temples and lay their offerings before some shrine they are doing that just as much in worship as our Christian in going to the altar.
- Fry: How much of this concept of Buddhism that you've just been talking about trickled through to you when you were there?
- Field: I don't think any of it did. I just simply know that, in this curious widening of spaces within me in which I say I reached out in my individual life and all that surrounded it into other peoples'. I found a peace as I watched these pilgrims as they would come to the shrine in Shwe Dagon pagoda. You know they are built in levels with these platforms. On each platform are many, many individual shrines with various images of the Buddha in different postures. None of the images, I would say, [inaudible] much pieces from museums. [Laughter]
- Fry: Oh, primitive, I guess.
- Field: Yes, exactly. And there they lay their flowers or their fruits, and their faces are absorbed in some beautiful and mystic kind of a light such as my ^{*}niece [Margaret Parton] described in The Leaf and the Flame that she saw in India once. A girl saw a light with a spiritual glow that she could never forget it. Well now, that girl was probably much more spiritually advanced than many of the Burmese I saw at these shrines. But certainly they all had a look of quiet inner peace and happiness.
- Fry: Oh really? And this you did notice?
- Field: That I did notice, and realized that when I read H. Fielding-Hall's The Soul of a People later on and he spoke of it that I had seen it, I realized I'd seen it and could confirm what he said. He thinks that all religions make their compromises between the great founder of the religion with his probably highly advanced spiritual goal and the lesser one. They make their compromises, and some make better ones than others, and he thinks the Burmese make the best.
- Fry: I would like to jump over to economics and ask you a question on that if you're through with religion.

*New York: Knopf, 1959. "The author's five years' experience in India as staff correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune and as the wife of a British correspondent."

Field: Yes, I'm through with religion for the present. [Laughter]
I warn you more will come later.

India and Burma and the British

Fry: Wonderful. I was wondering if you could evaluate what influence the contrast between India and Burma economic life had on your later turn toward socialism. Did that have any effect on it at all?

Field: Oh, I'm sure it did. Of course, I would like to think that out a little more deeply before I talk about it because when I came back to America conditions here were so different, and yet I never could get again a sense of only being a citizen of the United States. Like Thomas Paine, I really think I learned then that the world is my country; all men are my brothers. And so of course my socialistic persuasion, I think, had world value in my own mind, but I thought, I began to concentrate more and more in terms of the economic role in this country.

Fry: Let me ask you this then: did you think that Burma was superior to India in its economic life?

Field: Well, how can one say when they were both under English control and the economic life was under English control which was capitalistic and built on all that we know here with the variations that the British make. But I can't see that that could be answered unless you had lived during the era when the Burmese were free people.

Fry: Did you think that the Burmese were really just as much at a disadvantage as the Indians were in such matters as world trade and getting food for their own people and satisfying their own needs economically?

Field: I don't think they had done much world trade.

Fry: I was just wondering if after you saw India and saw the grain being shipped out of India when the people in it needed it, and saw how oppressed they were economically by the British, if you felt that the situation was any better in Burma?

Field: Oh, it was greatly bettered, but not by the English, by its own fertility and by the fact that the population was comparatively small. I think the British made on the surface very little difference in what might be called their welfare, their general

Field: welfare, because they [the Burmese] had never striven for those things which a capitalistic country does struggle for. They had very simple government organization. They weren't taxed to any great extent, as I understand, before the British came, and I don't think much more afterward.

I suppose if I should look into the economic history of Burma as a country I might find, and probably would find, that the British had confiscated large tracts of land from which they probably began to export. And yet I don't think that could have very much hurt the simple welfare of those people. And of course we must never forget that in some ways the English did them good. I think the English occupation prepared the way for the freedom of both India and Burma in a far more well-organized way than they could have ever done without knowing anything about government organization.

Fry: Their education really proceeded primarily because of the British occupation?

Field: Yes. And they [the British] did establish some hospitals. They weren't very good, but the one in Rangoon, named after Lord Curzon's wife, Lady Curzon Hospital, must have had pretty excellent training because the nurse that I had from there at the time that my little boy was born in Rangoon was an excellent nurse, a Burmese girl. The Burmese girls love the training as nurses and proved to be very fine nurses.

So you see you again have the illustration that in this world there is never anything but duality. We never get anything wholly bad or wholly good. There are always things to balance each other. And I'm sure the Burmese would say what I understand many of the Indians say, that they feel that the occupation had done much evil but had also done them much good.

Fry: So that ultimately they could earn their independence?

Field: Yes. They already knew parliamentary forms in India, you see. And what the free government of Burma has established since I was there--not very long after, you know, they got their freedom--I don't know. I just don't know how it's affected the country. I wish I did. If I were younger, I'd go back and see.

The Burmese and Religion

- Fry: I'm more interested in how it has affected you. Were you as disturbed about Burma as you were about India?
- Field: No, not at all disturbed about Burma in that respect. In fact, I don't remember any respect in which I was disturbed except in my own private life in regard to orthodoxy. In other words, Burma disturbed me personally rather than disturbing me in what I might call a universal way.
- Fry: You didn't have all the answers, and your husband didn't have all the answers--although he never thought you doubted he had the answers, but I mean at least at this point you began storing questions in your mind, religious--
- Field: Yes, they did. And those of course persisted and grew very fat. But I can't emphasize enough the fact that there couldn't be any disturbance in your feeling about Burma, unless you were an orthodox Christian and were troubled about the salvation of their souls. I didn't seem to get awfully troubled about that so easily even though I was supposed to.
- Fry: I guess this was his job, wasn't it?
- Field: That was his job. Of course, he didn't have a native attendance at his church. They were half natives and half whites, you know, the Eurasians by intermarriage.
- Fry: You mean each person was half and half?
- Field: Yes. It was called the Eurasian Baptist Church.
- Fry: Well, he wasn't really supposed to go out and proselytize the Buddhists?
- Field: No, he wasn't supposed to proselytize the Buddhists. He was more or less to preach the kind of sermon that these already converted Eurasians believed, and to perhaps save a soul here and there who came in that wasn't a believer. It wasn't really as, you might say, extreme, a religious undertaking that he took because it was like going to a church that was already established, whereas these missionaries go up into towns where they never heard of Christianity or anything. I think the missionary lives a far more dedicated life than the minister who goes over to take a church in a big Oriental city. I never thought of myself as a martyr or--

Fry: Pioneer?

Field: Well, I want something, [some word] pioneer, I guess, but I didn't think of myself as hard used or anything of that sort, but I do think that some of the missionaries that went up into desolate parts of the country and started from scratch were. And of course you understand that the further north you go the less Buddhistic the people were in many ways. They had worship of nature spirits. You see the country is--southern Burma, for instance, is very different from certain parts of the north. For instance, there is Karin country. Now they have gone overboard for Christianity, the Karins. There are more converts among them, and I think it's because they weren't as passionately Buddhistic as the southern Burmans were.

Then you go further north into the country called the Chin and the Kachin, that's their different tribes, and you find there almost, I think, pure nature spirits worship.

Fry: They worship--what do you call them, nats?

Field: Nats, yes. So there the missionaries have their field day, up in through there.

Fry: But your husband didn't have to go up there?

Field: No, we didn't do anything like that at all. And all I remember was that he said once that he wished that he could work among the actual Buddhist people. And I said to him, "You don't think you could convert them, do you? They look on Buddha just as we do on Christ." And he said, "Well, that's what I want to change."

Fry: Oh, when they were so happy--

Field: [Inaudible] ready to stop now.

Fry: All right. I had a question in my mind. I was wondering if you would want to say any more to portray how somehow a little girl from the protected environs of Detroit summoned up the courage to go through this? This is incredible to me. Were you ever frightened or--you seemed to have made it through these insurmountable difficulties and in completely different surroundings in a very beautiful sort of way.

Field: Well, I don't know that it was always beautiful. And your question emphasizes the fact that I've never done what Socrates said [inaudible], so I don't think I could tell why. I think there is through my ancestry, especially--no, I won't

Field: say especially on the Quaker side, my father had a kind of courageous meeting of difficulties in life. I think there is a kind of--what shall I say?--unconscious sense that what has to be met has to be met, and you can't do anything about conditions that are difficult. The only time I remember being really frightened was up alone in that country of north Burma because I hadn't learned yet how utterly free of gangsterism, so to speak, the Burmese were. They're gentle. Even the fiercer people are, up north. And of course not speaking the language and being alone there and with these Hindu servants only around me, and the ayah, I used to feel frightened at times, not because of any bodily harm to me but for fear something might happen to the baby. The conditions were pretty rough for him.

Fry: Primitive?

Field: Yes. And the rest of the strange events were so consuming to my mind and spirit I don't think I ever stopped to think about why I was meeting them.

Fry: You just met them because they had to be met?

Field: Yes they were, yes.

[end of interview]

IX BURMA TO DETROIT

[June 2, 1960]

Change of Plans

- Fry: Sara, had you been able to participate to any great extent in your husband's church in Rangoon?
- Field: No, not to any great extent. I would have been willing to, I say, I know, but I was already pregnant when we arrived. As long as I could I went to church and met the people and evidently must have contributed something (though it's very hard for me to remember just what), because the adorable way that all the women members began giving me little knitted socks and little knitted jackets and so on shows that I must have made quite an acquaintance and I have never forgotten that. But for the most part I felt the climate very much, and under my doctor's direction I didn't try to be too active. I had a bicycle, I remember, and in the cool of the evening could bicycle around and could visit a few people if they were very sick. It was part of a minister's duties. But for the most part I would say that I was a very inefficient minister's wife due to the circumstances.
- Fry: You needed the ministering to, really, at that point.
- Field: I'm afraid that I more or less did, but never did I wish it to the extent that it seemed to prey on me as time went on.
- Fry: I would like to ask a corollary to that question. Did you have any close friends in the church congregation?
- Field: No. I think the time was too short for me to say they were close friends. I had friends. But in the long sweep of years, in the current on which you're carried down from event to event, I am sorry to say I can't distinguish them very well in my mind. I just know that they were kind and good and that they did all they could for me because I must have appeared, as I myself

- Field: couldn't see, rather frail. I was very slim, almost too slim, until pregnancy of course made the difference. And when they knew that I was pregnant that appealed to the maternal hearts of the women, and as I say they did all these kind things. But I can't remember any close friendships.
- Fry: Any girls your age?
- Field: No. My close friendships, curiously enough, were outside the church. They were with the Tillys, and they were the people who really sustained me and almost were the backbone of my life, because as the baby grew heavier within me I couldn't get about much. I think I have told how they would send their carriage in the afternoons, giving up their own drive to the Cantonment Lakes, where all the English went out on an evening to get the cool breezes, and sending me instead. Only one who knows what custom means to the English, how routine is important and even sustaining to their lives, can understand the extremely great sacrifice that they made. Even I didn't realize it to the full until years later as I grew to know more about the English way of life in general.
- Fry: That must have been a very great contribution to your predicament at that time though, to have somebody who was English-speaking--and they had a daughter your age.
- Field: Indeed it was. And it was from her [Mrs. Tilly] that I learned very much indeed as to how to take care of the baby. So you can see there was a bond between, you might say, the English character and my own. I think I was capable of responding to their much less demonstrative but very practical kind of affection.
- Fry: Now when it became necessary for you to go to the United States how was this decision arrived at? What brought it on?
- Field: Well, evidently my doctor, the doctor who took care of me at the birth of my little boy, knew (as I didn't know) the seriousness of the condition in which the birth had left me. Her name was Dr. Fowler-Thompson. She had been a missionary, had come over as Dr. Fowler, a medical missionary, and married a fine old captain who ran a passenger launch on the Irrawaddy. They had their headquarters in Rangoon. She still carried on as much of her medical work as she could after marriage, and I guess that was a great deal. She of course didn't have the knowledge that obstetricians have today, and I wasn't subjected to any check-ups or any of those precautionary measures that I later saw my daughter having the advantage of.

So I imagine that at the time of the birth--and I have to

Field: use the word "imagine" because no girl was less conscious of her body, that is, of her physical state than I (and I speak of that because I think it was very typical of my generation, that so little emphasis had been made either in school or in the home on anatomy and general structure and the great experience of what birth was), so that when I was carrying my baby I had no sense of any lack of care. I just felt it was a natural thing. All the native women had their babies without any such prenatal care, and why should I have any? That would have been my thought if I had thought at all.

So when the actual birth came and I was very seriously injured, because--I think I have told why: that the chloroform was giving out, that Dr. Fowler-Thompson I think became a little panicky and the baby was taken rather violently, with forceps, fortunately uninjured as to his own precious life, but leaving me very badly injured. So when I went up to Bhamo, as I told in my last interview, I think she had been aware then that I wouldn't be able to go on living in the Orient in the condition I was in, seeing that no surgeons there were capable of performing the intricate and complex operation that I needed.

Fry: You were supposed to have been there for about six more years, weren't you?

Field: Oh, yes. We were supposed to stay seven years, before our first chance to return to America came. And my husband had set his heart on doing this work. And I think she [Dr. Fowler-Thompson] knew that to send me up to Bhamo with the idea that it was really a kind of preparation for having me leave would have disturbed me greatly for his sake. So I did go ignorant of the fact, if it was a fact.

Anyway, when we got back it was in November. Dr. Fowler-Thompson had held a consultation with other doctors in Rangoon, English doctors mostly, and they had all decided that it would be impossible for me to do anything but go home and have this surgery done. So we did go home.

Fry: Now, you were up in Bhamo at the time that this was decided?

Field: Yes, I was, and evidently when my husband came up to Bhamo to get me they had told this to him. But he didn't tell me until we got back to Rangoon. I'm very glad he didn't because the longer I was kept in ignorance of it the more untroubled my mind was. I was in a good deal of misery physically but I had that austerity in my blood, I guess, that felt that for the sake of my husband's work I would have to stand this and get along as best I could. But of course that was very ignorant austerity,

Field: because the best I could have done would have been probably to have gotten dysentery or some other grave disease under these conditions and die, which probably wouldn't have been too good for his interests either.

So when I got back, he broke it to me, that the doctors had felt that we would have to go back to America. Of course I think that my spirits were supported by the thought that we would get this surgery done and they would send us back again. I had no desire to hurt his career, and since he had left a very good church in Springfield, Ohio, to do this work, to go out there, it was really a serious blow to me to think that it was my condition that was interfering. But I remember Dr. Fowler-Thompson saying rather humorously, "Well, he had something to do with the fact that this baby came, and the way that the baby came does make it necessary for you." She talked to me very seriously and I think it opened her eyes greatly to the wrong that was done to the young women of my time in America, not letting them know more about these matters of body.

Return Home

So we prepared for the trip. I have only a vague remembrance of almost a nightmare trip because I was so ill and had this precious child. We had a great deal to do, with preparations for how we would feed him on the trip, and I was heartbroken to think that I wasn't going to be able to take my ayah back with me. I'd become extremely fond of her. And she had shown great capacity as a baby nurse. But of course I couldn't take her back to America, where she wouldn't have been happy nor would she have fitted into the life here. So there it was. I was on this ship with my baby and my husband, who did heroic service in helping me with the little fellow. I think that he must have been all of the wonderful child that I had believed him to be when he was born, because the passengers couldn't get over how little fuss he made, how little annoyance, any crying he gave them. Altogether I have to sum up that trip with merely the remembrance that we some way made it to New York.

Fry: It was just a nightmare then?

Field: It was a nightmare, and I was evidently in a far more serious condition than I had any idea because--

Fry: Were you bedridden or--?

Field: Most of the time.

Fry: --or feverish or--?

Field: Well, I was in such bad condition that I could almost not keep any food at all. It would run right straight through me. And I had a great deal of physical discomfort and pain. So I was more or less bedridden through the journey. I would get up in late afternoons and be helped onto the deck. I got very weak indeed.

Fry: Yes, not being able to eat.

Field: But when we got to New York almost a miracle happened. I had an uncle who was at that time very prosperous, and who had been informed, I suppose by my parents, of our arrival in New York. He lived near in a Connecticut town.

Fry: I'm trying to place which uncle this would be?

Field: On my father's side. It was an uncle named Albert, again, Uncle Albert, my father's youngest brother. He was an inventor and had made a good deal of money by inventing various things for the Goodrich Rubber Company which was then in existence. He had bought this rather beautiful home near to Waterbury. He came up from Waterbury to meet us at the dock and he had us taken to a wonderful--or so it seemed to my naive and unsophisticated self--a wonderful suite in one of the now older hotels. There we stayed for about three days before I was even able to face the trip by train to Detroit.

Fry: Had you had any medical attention yet?

Field: No, none whatsoever. The physician on the boat would look in at me and shake his head. I think he thought I was certainly headed for the grave but didn't know anything to do for it. So I can say I had no medical attention. My uncle was shocked at the way I looked and did everything in his power to make the stay in New York pleasant and comfortable and healthful, and put us on the train which went by way, at the end at least, of Canada. I'm a little vague about this because after all, you know, I'm talking about nearly sixty years ago.

Fry: In the condition you were in you weren't sightseeing anyway. I mean how could you notice where the train was going?

Field: No, I didn't, and my concern was all for the child. My concern wasn't for myself at all. I probably would have been fearfully concerned if I had known what a dreadful condition I was in.

Fry: You were taking care of that baby.

Field: I was taking care of that baby, as much as I could, and my husband was doing the rest. We had to give him, of course, some of this prepared food on the ship. I couldn't get fresh milk.

Fry: Now what time of year was this?

Field: By this time it was getting into December, and I remember that we had to take a ship after we got to Windsor, which is in Canada, which had to really almost have to have an ice-cutter. I think it did have one because the Detroit River was frozen over.

But eventually we got to Detroit. And of course, once again in my parents' home, there was a sense of safety.

Medical Attention

Fry: This was your first feeling of a kind of relief, I guess.

Field: Yes. And my older sister, Mary, was home for the Christmas vacation. She was teaching at the time I speak of in a little town in Michigan, teaching in high school, and had come home for the Christmas vacation. And she was passionately fond of children, so she took over the care of Albert. And I was immediately almost--I think as soon as possible, anyway--taken to the office of the then greatest obstetrician in I think that part of the country. His name was Dr. Manton. He came highly recommended by eminent friends of my parents who were also fond of me and had once wanted to adopt me if my parents would have allowed it.

Fry: Is that right?

Field: Yes, they were very wealthy and had no children. She couldn't have children and wanted very much that my mother would allow them to have me in their home as their daughter. But of course my mother couldn't bring herself to that. Again they were like the Tillys, these friends, watching over me in my miseries at that time, and they were the ones that told us of Dr. Manton. I imagine she had had him a great deal in an effort to have children and had grown fond of him.

The visit to that office is something I do not forget because for the first time I began to realize in what shape

Field: I was. For this great doctor could not conceal his astonishment at the extent of my injuries and at my ability to have made the trip under the conditions that I had.

Fry: He was amazed?

Field: It was amazing. He said later that it was the worst laceration he had ever seen in all his life from a childbirth, and as he'd had great experience I can believe that I must have been in a state that made him wonder why I could take the trip home. I think it is a great illustration of two things mingling: of what ignorance can do with you, plus a kind of courage which came from both my blood and from my maternal feeling for the child, that I forgot myself as much as possible in the desire that he should arrive home safe and well.

It was a great blessing to have had my sister Mary then to come in and do all the things that were necessary, boiling the bottles--they did know that at that time--and the nipples, and preparing his formula, and generally caring for him while I was being built up, for Dr. Manton said very firmly he would undertake no operation on me after this ordeal of the trip and the situation being as complex as it was until I had been built up.

He put me on a very nourishing diet, and incidentally it introduces a rather amusing incident. One of the things which he ordered for me was that I should have eggnog twice a day with port wine in it. Now, this relates to a situation which had been very tense with my mother, and that is her almost fanatical prohibition feeling. This had come about, I think, as a kind of trauma from her early girlhood because my Grandfather Stevens, my mother's father, had had an excellent cellar despite his Quakerism, for there are Quakers who had no objection to drinking, and especially wine. And at his early death there was that cellar. And my mother's brother Charley drank to excess. She saw him drunk once or twice and I think it was such a shock to her that she vented all her venom, of which she didn't have very much for anything else, against alcohol in general, and vowed she would never have a drop in her house.

Well, here was Dr. Manton ordering port wine, and there was nothing for it but to obey his orders. But every time the eggnog was made--and I had my doubts as to whether in making it my mother didn't spare the measurement of port a good deal--the bottle was hidden immediately so that no one entering the house would ever see that her house was polluted by having in it a bottle of alcohol. I feel some remorse as I think of how in late years she must have suffered visiting us, all her children, and finding them all not alcoholics at all, but liking their

Field: little nip at night.

Fry: And not even keeping it hidden.

Field: And not keeping it hidden, having it right out on the buffet.

Fry: In plain sight of God and everyone!

Field: So rapidly does the era change.

Well, after several months, about three months, of this kind of intensive upbuilding--

Christmas

Fry: Before we got to the hospital, would you like to say something about Christmas?

Field: Oh, yes. I'm so glad you mentioned it because of this. By this time the baby, Albert, was several months old. And one of the things that he was always almost intensively attracted to was light of any kind. So my sister said, "We're going to have a Christmas tree this Christmas for the baby's sake, and we're going to have the candles." Of course it was very soon after our arrival that Christmas came because I think it was mid-December when we got home. I was very pleased about this because--have I said in a former interview that we never had a Christmas tree?

Fry: No.

Field: My father considered it a pagan custom so we had never had a Christmas tree. But evidently being a grandfather may have broken down his resistance to the pagan element, and a Christmas tree we had. And I shall remember as long as I live carrying Albert into the room, my sister carrying him, and his eager and frustrated look and his effort to grasp the light on the tree, and the sense that the tree gave him, if it didn't give anyone else, the complete satisfaction that all the trouble my sister had gone to deserved to get.

I think that was the outstanding remembrance of that Christmas. Of course it wasn't what you might call too gay because I was still not strong and my parents were very much perturbed in general about the whole outcome of this adventure to the Orient. But it was enough that Albert had had his first

- Field: Christmas tree and had responded to the lights.
- Fry: I was wondering how you felt your father's attitude was on this return home?
- Field: Well, I often think about that, Chita.
- Fry: That's something we could handle in the next interview.
- Field: I think very likely we'd better because as I meditate on it in quiet that will come back to me, I'm sure, or may come back later. My mother's attitude I can remember very distinctly. She was extremely happy to be a grandmother but, as I can now see it, it was mixed with anxiety because Dr. Manton had been very frank with her, to say that I was in such bad condition that it would be only my youth that could possibly stand the seriousness of the operations that had to be done. And I think that that didn't make her very happy.

These dates, of course, about these personal matters are utterly out of my power of recalling nor are they probably necessary. The event itself--I was just about as ignorant of operations as I was about everything else. And I do not remember having any apprehensions whatsoever. This may be just something that's forgotten. And that might be a good part of the [inaudible] fact of my intense ignorance about everything connected with medicine. I'd never been sick enough to have a doctor, I think, in my life--

- Fry: Oh, really?
- Field: --at the time I went to Burma. So I naturally was ignorant on that subject. Well, the day came and I understand that I had to be kept under the anesthetic for very many hours while all the damage and repairs were being done.

[end of interview]

X THE BODY RECOVERS, THE MIND GROWS

[June 8, 1960]

Surgery

- Fry: I think it's a little hard to realize how extensive the damage from childbirth was in view of your behavior after childbirth. You seemed somehow to muddle through living in northern Burma with just your nursemaid, and then you had the long ocean voyage and then the train trip to Detroit.
- Field: Well, I can only say that two factors were involved in my ability to withstand the difficulties that all this damage had produced. One was extreme youth. The other I think would interest psychologists. If I had had a knowledge of how very damaged I was I presume I would have been frightened. As it was I was most uncomfortable. I had excessive difficulties. But somehow it seemed as if I took it in my stride as a necessary thing. And the fact of a kind of psychological calmness helped to minimize what would have seemed far worse to me now. I really have come to have enormous value on this quietness of mind in cases of extreme physical difficulty, and also to have almost an awe of the power of youth, for the damage was very bad indeed.
- Fry: I think it is necessary to at least have a vague notion of just how extensive the damage was.
- Field: I think I mentioned to you, didn't I, that the perineum was completely torn away and clear back into the sphincter muscle of the rectum, and that there was serious damage to the uterus itself. And in fact all that could possibly happen from a violent birth, a birth of a child who was taken with forceps in what I now think was fear on the part of the doctor that the oxygen [chloroform] would give out before he arrived. I think that gives you a picture perhaps of the state I was in.

Field: And how I managed the trip up to northern Burma and then later the long voyage home is as much a mystery to me as it would be to anyone knowing the situation I was in. But a kind of austerity and innocence--or ignorance that this wasn't the sort of thing that women had to bear--all, I think, added together made me quiet under it.

Fry: Well then, when you did go in for your operation in Detroit you had been educated by that time, you said, by your doctor and you knew the seriousness of this--

Field: Yes, I did. He told me it was extremely serious and that the operation would involve many hours of repair work and it might be that he couldn't even do it all in one operation, I might have to have more than one operation, but he hoped to do it in one operation. And this was the reason he was so anxious to build my physical strength up which I think under his guidance was done.

When he gave the word I went into the hospital in Detroit, the best hospital (whose name now escapes me; it'll probably return in time), and was given a very fine nurse (whose name I do remember, Miss Carlson), and put under the anesthetic. I remember this as the first time of a kind of revolt on my part. I didn't go under easily. I choked on it, and you can understand the techniques in that day were not very perfected. But I finally evidently got under and Dr. Manton was able to do the operation all at the one time, though it took many hours. I think I was five hours under the anesthetic, and so long indeed, that evidently, there was fear that my life hung in the balance because I remember, when I did begin to sleepily come out of it, hearing the nurse and the doctor talking. What they said doesn't now seem to remain in my mind but I know it was to the effect that I had been under very long and they were worried that I didn't come out from under it. And there was an implication that it might end in death.

But I evidently felt the need to reassure the doctor because as little by little I came out of the operation, and this is something he could never get over, I said to him in a sleepy, drawling voice, "Doctor, how do we know that Caesar married an Irishwoman?" And he looked at me like a man who was afraid I had lost my mind. And he said, "Well, I'm sure I don't know." And I said, "Because when he came to the Tiber he proposed to bridge it."

I think that the combination of great danger I had been in and the absurdity of this ridiculous conundrum--the doctor's astounded face will never go from me. I feel a little ashamed and a little proud because I think I was trying to comfort him

Field: and say, "I'm not dying at all."

Fry: You were cheering him up.

Field: Yes, I was cheering him up and the nurse up. Well, it's very evident that I had recovered, but I had to spend some weeks in a hospital. They did not have the same methods of treatment that they have today where they get you out of bed in a hurry. In fact it was thought that I must lie still for a long time. And again I think it was youth that came to the rescue and kept me from being musclebound and having all those difficulties of adhesions that most people get if they lie still after operations. I don't think I had any such things. I seemed to have gotten on my feet eventually and not have had any complications at all.

Fry: It was about your turn not to have any, I think.

Field: I think so, but evidently the doctors still felt that before I engaged in any association with church work which my husband might undertake again soon I should still have rest. There was enough to do with the little baby.

Recuperation

So we went to a place in New York state called Clifton Springs, which was a place for invalids, and lived in a boarding house with the baby. He continued to thrive, I'm glad to say.

Fry: I'm trying to place in my mind how old the baby was then?

Field: By this time the baby was nearly a year old.

Fry: Was this summertime now?

Field: It was in the spring after our return, the late spring [1902]. Of course, these details are very unimportant in a way. I only speak of it because I am impressed, as I'm sure everyone is, but I had to learn it, that but for this power of youth and ignorance I wouldn't have survived.

Fry: If someone had been there to tell you what a terrible case you were you might not have made it at all.

Field: I might not have made it at all.

Fry: So you went to Clifton Springs, and what did you do there, just

Fry: relax?

Field: I just relaxed. I didn't have any housekeeping to do, of course, living in a boardinghouse. And I had time just to care for the baby, who was always a wonderful child in disposition and ease of care, so that I soon began to regain my normal state of strength.

Fry: Did the church send you there?

Field: I think the missionary union must have done that, probably with some help of my parents. That was another aspect of life to which I seemed to have been never quite conscious, the financial means. They seemed to have always been supplied in some way without any question on my part.

Fry: This is a typical missionary's wife's attitude. You always have faith in manna falling from heaven when you need it.

Field: And I must say I think the faith has been justified. We stayed there evidently two or three months. And it was while we were there that my husband must have corresponded with another minister who had been in the theological seminary with him and who had a pastorate in a little town called Wallingford, Connecticut. This minister was going to go to Europe for the summer following this spring and wanted my husband to take his church for the summer. So we moved, went from Clifton Springs to Wallingford, where again I didn't keep house. You see, there was no use to begin to buy furniture we didn't have or in any other way to do the things one does for a permanent abiding place because we knew it was just a summer place.

I remember that summer as an extremely lovely one. The weather must have been beautiful and it was a pleasure to take the baby out in his little go-cart. He was rapidly advancing in his mental processes, and was a great joy in every way. I don't think I tried to enter into the work there very much, at the church at Wallingford. I have no memory of forming any great ties with people in the church. I felt more or less that it was what it was, just a temporary stopover until we would get a permanent place.

New Haven and Yale

As my husband had not been called to any church by the time the minister of the Wallingford church returned, we decided to go to New Haven, which was just a short distance away from

Field: Wallingford, and my husband would attend Yale Theological Seminary. I don't think there was a seminary, but there certainly was a department in which he could brush up on Hebrew and on Biblical exegesis, as it was called.

All the new work was being done in those days in finding out the different hands that had written the Bible, the different people. For instance, Genesis. I remember so well seeing a copy of the manuscript of the man who first, I believe, was responsible for this discovery that there were several different authors for a single book that one had thought had been written entirely by Moses or someone of that sort. There was a very evident showing of the creation being told twice in the Genesis, which I'd never known. And this manuscript was all marked with red ink lines and broken up into its sections of authorship. I never shall know, because I was not very interested by this time, I'm afraid, in this type of learning, how much my husband absorbed of the fact that the whole approach to religion was changing, and there was the approach of scholarship. But I do remember being interested in it myself. What he got out of it I don't know.

But what I got out of it was a confirmation of what was growing in me.

Fry: Yes, that has staggering implications.

Field: Yes, that orthodoxy was a very questionable matter.

Fry: This scholarship approach put in question the whole basis in the belief that the Bible was written by the hand of God through that person.

Field: Exactly.

Fry: It put it as a human document.

Field: A human document with very many changes, additions, and subtractions, evidently. Ever since I in later years read Freud's Moses and Monotheism I have realized how the beginning of the belief that these various hands were at work on the Bible has had its, you might say, culmination in Freud's researches in which he makes the hypothesis that Moses was an Egyptian and that the monotheism really came from the Egyptians and not originally from the Jews as they have always claimed. But that was to be very much later when my mind had expanded way beyond the confines of the church walls.

Fry: I was wondering if at this time at Yale you and your husband Albert had become aware of any difference in theological beliefs,

Fry: enough to make you a little bit uncomfortable about it.

Field: I can't remember that we discussed them very much except that he would always seem to oppose anything that was new and antagonistic to what he held. He was fossilized already. He was unchangeable in the early opinions and faith that he had when he was younger, a young man. This lack of flexibility in his mind was, I think, always difficult, so difficult for me that rather than get into arguments over things I just kept them to myself and did my own thinking in silence.

Fry: So he went ahead then and studied.

Field: Yes, he studied. I must tell you a little about how we lived, as it seems to me now, looking back, from hand to mouth. We lived in a very dark boardinghouse. Evidently the missionary union was allowing us a certain amount to live on until my husband got a permanent church again, but it was so little we couldn't afford to live in anything but a second-rate boardinghouse. There we had a bedroom at one end of the house, and then way down a dark hall we had a kitchen, which I think I managed to divide by a screen (either loaned me or picked up at a tiny price) so that we would have half of the kitchen for a dining room.

Professor Lounsbury

Then, since I wanted very much to take some work at Yale and Yale was good to the wives of students who came there for their work, I got a little nursemaid to come in and take Albert during those hours that I wanted to go to Professor Robert Lounsbury's classes. But before I speak of that, which was a very great event in my life, I would like to say that though I describe this place now as so dreary--and dreary it was--youth again overcame everything, and it didn't seem to me at all at that time too bad, especially as I began to get acquainted with some of the young Yale students. And I was young and they were young, and I was a pretty good cook. I don't know how I came to be a good cook. I must have been because I remember I asked them to come into this little kitchen-dining room and have dinners with us quite often. This livened the place up and one became unconscious of the physical surroundings because one was enjoying a mental and, in a sense, a social life that obscured the dreariness of the surroundings.

And then I was very happy with the little boy and with the work that I was allowed to do with Professor Lounsbury. Of course,

Field: the wives of students usually, unless they were very exceptional women who had gone through college and gotten degrees, were only allowed to audit classes. That was all right with me. I wasn't there for credits. I was there to learn, and Professor Lounsbury, who was at once a great Chaucer student and a great lecturer on the 19th-century poets, especially Browning, was my goal and ambition. I wanted to get to his classes.

Fry: Which class did you take under him?

Field: I took the 19th-century poets.

Fry: A sort of survey?

Field: Yes, of the 19th-century poets, with very much emphasis, of course, on Browning because that was his boy. I think probably I would have never even faintly understood Browning but through his interpretations. His great limitation was that all poetry seemed to have ended with Tennyson. He couldn't see Whitman nor any of those later poets who were beginning to write in terms of their own era. He loved Tennyson and for a while gave me such a love of him that I learned the whole of "In Memoriam" by heart. I can't say that that is a love that has increased with the years. He is a little too sweet and a little too mellifluous, although he has of course great beauty in some of his poems. So I passed through this fine chance for survey and criticism into the new era in which I was going to write some myself.

Fry: Before we get to that I did want to ask you: didn't you say something when you were talking with me the other day off the tape about his view of Browning not agreeing with your view of Browning, that you never could quite go along with him?

Field: No, I never could quite go along with him but I now feel that my difference with him was a very immature difference. I didn't like the so-called Browning obscurity. I now have the feeling that Browning was very much of a forerunner of what I call the puzzle poetry of today, in which a great deal is left for the person to discover. I waited until after class one day and very shyly asked Professor Lounsbury if I could begin handing in papers. I said, "I know that's rather forward of me because you have plenty to read of the students without somebody outside." And he said, "I should be very glad to have you hand in papers."

Fry: Oh, what an opportunity.

Field: So I did. I handed in my papers right along with the others, and he evidently was quite pleased with them because one day after class he asked me to remain. And he said to me, "My

Field: eyes are going"--probably glaucoma, of which they knew nothing then--"and I need someone to read to me afternoons or evenings for two or three hours. Would you be willing to do that?"

I was not only willing but thrilled for many reasons, because though we had been trying to eke out our existence by teaching English in night school to the immigrants who were pouring in, we were always in need of a little more. And he offered me a remuneration which I felt he wanted me to take and that he would have felt too indebted to me for giving him that time if I hadn't. So that was a help, but most of all was the association with him in those weeks. It didn't last very long.

Fry: It was just for a few weeks?

Field: It was only a few weeks that I did this reading with him because he became ill and had to have another professor take his classes for quite a long time. I have to look up those dates. I tried to find if I had a diary at that time, which, alas, I couldn't find because the dates are a little confused in my mind.

Fry: Well, we can look that up later. Now you had mentioned about wanting to go into the area of writing poetry yourself. Did this happen while you were reading to him?

Field: I think once in awhile when he was in the mood or needed a little rest from my reading he would discuss certain poetic passages with me. One day he said to me, "You know, I have an idea you're a poet. Have you ever tried to find out?" And I shyly said that I had tried and that I hoped that some day I would write some poetry that would be worthy.

And he said, "Well, I would certainly advise you to proceed in that line because I have a feeling that there's a poet in you."

Fry: He hadn't read any of your poetry at this point?

Field: No.

Fry: It was your insights into poetry that he was referring to, a poetic nature?

Field: Yes, and I think that just as Emily Dickinson felt that the suggestion from her teacher that she was a poet sent her on into the marvelous production that she did, so my very humble offerings in poetry were largely due to his belief that I had the poetic quality.

- Fry: Did this start you writing seriously right then in Yale or while you were at Yale?
- Field: I was writing off and on all the time but I was more or less aware that they weren't what I liked. At the time I wrote them they seemed to be pretty good and then I came back to them and they were not good and I would throw them away.
- Fry: You'd grown past them already?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: When did you do this writing, Sara? How was it possible, with a baby to take care of and meals to get and night-teaching to do and classes to attend?
- Field: I say again only because of the fact that youth seems to have an eternal inner strength. I used to wake up at night sometimes and write after I had had an hour or two of sleep. Now, when I see how lack of sleep troubles my mind so that I can't even compose this tape-recording as well as I'd like to, I marvel at the fact that I had a creative strength after so little sleep then, even though it didn't produce anything very important.
- Fry: That's amazing. Would you like to sum up here what sort of insights Lounsbury was able to give you along your road as you progressed to a poet?
- Field: I think I'd rather reserve that for a session on poetry. May we do that?
- Fry: Sure. I had another question about Lounsbury in my mind. I was just thinking it would be interesting to know what sort of teacher he was. How did he teach?
- Field: He taught in the very formal manner of that day, by lectures which he read. There would be certain days when if he got through in time he would allow questions, and then he would give examinations on his papers. It was all formalized to a degree.
- Fry: But no questions, no discussions in the class?
- Field: No, and I missed that very much. I wished for it even though I had never had it in any other way except in high school. We had had discussions in our class in high school and these had always been the most productive part of the session.
- Fry: Did he have a sense of humor at all?
- Field: Yes, in a kind of dry way he did. I would say he had more of a

- Field: sense of irony than he had of humor. But irony can have a humorous aspect or color to it. He was quite old, you understand, and when some years later I wrote him to ask him if he would re-evaluate my then-husband's great poem The Poet in the Desert, he dictated a letter to say that his eyes had entirely gone and that he wasn't able to do it, so you can see he was aging when I sat under his fine instruction.
- Fry: How did you happen to know about him? You were not in the academic world.
- Field: Well, I suppose I just smelled him out, so to speak. Not a very pretty metaphor, but I think where you passionately love literature and learning, learning in a field that is dear to you, you just inquire. And I felt this was too good an opportunity to be lost.
- Fry: I'd like to ask you too, when you first saw him what kind of a man did you think he was? Was he a giant or a dwarf physically?
- Field: He was neither a giant nor a dwarf. He was a medium-sized man with a rather noble face. He had gray hair and a beard and a rather patrician face, I would say.

Teaching Night School

I'd like to speak a little bit about the experience we had also with teaching night school. Both my then husband and I had this opportunity because though I didn't know German too well--it was German immigrants that were coming in in great numbers then--my husband, of course, came of German ancestry and spoke it fluently. And my own German wasn't too bad in that day because though it was high school German I had continued reading with my husband. We had a Bible in German and I knew a number of the Psalms by heart in German, and we went into other reading together in German. So I kept it up and got a lot more proficient than I otherwise would have been. But it wasn't very needed because what they wanted as soon as possible was to get the German immigrants talking English. But you did have to have just enough German so that you could write the common German words on the blackboard and then put the English word under them, and then pronounce it for them and make them do it. It was a very simple process. But it gave me a chance to see what fine quality was coming into the country then. They were really people who I think have since given strength to this country.

- Fry: And they were all German?

- Field: They were the type, I imagine, though not so educated as those Germans that Carl Schultz--wasn't that his name?--brought to Wisconsin. (Carl Schurz was his name.)
- Fry: Could you give us an idea of what sorts of backgrounds they had? Would you say they were laborers in general?
- Field: They were mostly laborers. But the German laborer, sooner or later, in whatever labor he is engaged, becomes skilled somehow. I notice it yet. I have a German gardener now who began by just having an idea that gardening was perhaps cultivating the ground a little and watering; and gradually, because of that intensive desire to perform whatever task he is doing well he now is an expert gardener. And I had that feeling in these people about learning English. They didn't want to just have a poor English. They wanted to have English well, and it was a pleasure to work with them. They were all so earnest.
- Fry: How many times did they come to night school a week?
- Field: Well, I remember I only myself went--whether they came more for other teachers--I only went, I think, two nights a week, and my husband went two nights a week.
- Fry: But they had to do this, I guess, in addition to their factory work?
- Field: Yes, yes, so you can imagine that they were tired.
- Those weren't the days of high pay and short hours by any means.
- Fry: In teaching these immigrants did you get to have enough contact with them and conversations with them to have any other ideas about social inequalities such as you got from your trip to India?
- Field: Oh, I was aware of the social inequalities, I think, from the time that I lived in the Orient on, but always with growing perception and with an ability to examine it. I just felt so immersed in the lack of social distinction in Burma after the caste system of India that I think from that time on I wanted all society to be as free from distinction as that country was.
- Fry: Did they tell you enough about the old country for you to have any feelings about what they came from?
- Field: No, they didn't. Our relations were very strictly on the ground of pupils and teacher.

Fry: Where were these classes held? Were they near you?

Field: They were near me. They were held in one of the high school buildings near me.

Fry: So you didn't have to go into a really bad section of town?

Field: Oh no, indeed. These were all conducted under the school section of New Haven.

Fry: I see. And they were adults?

Field: They were all adults, more or less young.

Fry: Well then, how long did you stay in Yale?

Field: We stayed there about six months and then my husband got this call to the church in Cleveland.

Fry: So you went to Cleveland then in the early spring of the next year?

Field: Yes, in the early spring of the next year. We went to Cleveland in the spring of 1903 and left seven years later.

[end of interview]

XI CLEVELAND: NEW ATTITUDES

[February 28, 1961]

Practical Application of Religion

- Fry: Sara, how did your experiences at Yale and in India and Burma prepare the way for the experiences you were about to have in Cleveland?
- Field: They prepared me by opening my eyes to the inequalities in society, and not only opening my eyes but opening my heart, because the feeling for the poor was very intense. I felt, without having the academic background to prove it, that somehow society would never be able to endure with this imbalance. I'd had no training in sociology or economics, or any of these fields, that would have introduced me to books dealing with subjects of this kind. Therefore all I can say is that I had the awareness that the problem existed, the determination that, as far as I could, I would some day do what I could to help others to see it. For this purpose I could not have gone to a more wonderful place in the United States than to Cleveland, which at that time was probably the most progressive city and was encountering the terrific opposition of wealth in a way that allowed me to learn some of the causes of a society's imbalance, through lectures, through books that I had heard of and read, and that is the greatest benefit I can say that my mind received from the previous years.
- Fry: Why don't you start, then, with the beginning of your residence in Cleveland, and describe your church work and then go on to how you got into your work under Tom Johnson?
- Field: We went to a very poor church in Cleveland. It was one of those poor churches that were only economically kept alive by the fact that it had three or four rich families supporting it, beside the humble offerings of the many that were either in very much less

Field: good circumstances or outright poor. One of the very first things that I decided must be done was to have a free kindergarten, to which the children of the members of the church and of the neighborhood could come, because in those days almost all the kindergartens were private. So we got the funds from some of the richer people in the church, and when the times were very bad--the depression of 1903, as you remember, being one of the worst times that this country's gone through, until perhaps the thirties--we also opened a soup kitchen. This was all very new to the parishoners of our church, this application of the teachings, let us say, of Jesus to practical affairs, but to me, it seemed a religion in itself. And yet I was not happy about it either, because of course it was handouts, rather than any kind of permanent solution. Still it was better than doing nothing or merely asking people to come to church to hear sermons and children to go to Sunday school in which they were not interested.

So I began a kind of practical work out of this experience that I'd had in the past, seeing such poverty, and sooner or later it came to the ears of the ever-listening office of Tom Johnson. I got a letter from him asking me if I would drop into his office some day and see him. Of course, I was awed by this, because Tom Johnson was already a very controversial figure. In the eyes of the liberals, he was a very great man; in the eyes of the rich right, he was a criminal or something near to a criminal. He was trying to destroy property; he was trying to destroy private ownership. As far back as that these charges were made against a man who was urging public ownership, which has become commonplace today.

Education in Politics and Economics

Fry: You were aware all this time, I guess, of the controversy?

Field: No, I wasn't aware of it. It wasn't until I had had a talk with him that he told me something of it and told me that it had been in the papers for two or three years before we arrived. I remember going to the Cleveland morning paper--

Fry: The News?

Field: No, the Cleveland Plain Dealer. I remember going to that office, and looking up the stories of the fight, which were usually very garbled or all in favor of the opposition. But I also found a labor paper, whose name I do not remember, which gave me something

- Field: of a very positive side of Johnson's program, and then it began to be publicly discussed in the meetings that Tom Johnson instituted to educate the people.
- Fry: Were these the tent meetings?
- Field: These were the tent meetings. They were set up in parks, sometimes on the outskirts of Cleveland, and eminent speakers came, among them Henry George, the single-tax advocate. It was there that I heard him; he was, of course, quite an elderly man, at that time, and very soon after, I believe, he died, but I did hear him speak. This led me to read the first great book I had ever encountered that had [inaudible] my mind of poverty and wealth, his great book, called Progress and Poverty.
- Fry: Sara, I think I got you off the track a little bit. Could you tell what took place in this interview with Tom Johnson?
- Field: Not very well. It was very brief, he was too busy a man to give one much time, but he said that he was interested in hearing that I had made an effort to relieve some of the needs of the community in which my church was--our church was--and he then said, "I am myself trying to go deeper," I remember that, "and bring about a solution which is basic and not just passing and temporary." That I remember very well. But very soon he was notified by his secretary that someone was waiting for him, and I can't remember what--I was pretty awed anyway. I was awfully young still, and really foundering in this whole subject because I really knew so little, in a bookish way, about it all.
- Fry: I wondered if, through your connections as a minister's wife, you had run up against Mr. Cooley who was, I believe, the mayor's officer for--what would you call it?--taking care of criminals.
- Field: Yes, and the man who instituted the farms. Yes, indeed, I had the great pleasure of just meeting him and also hearing him give a lecture on the subject of these farms and of their necessity. He saw even then how the growth of juvenile delinquency had to be met, and I think all that happened in Cleveland was so far-seeing, as I look at society today, that I am amazed at these seers and prophets who lectured in the tents and gave us an insight into what were social needs. Mr. Cooley's farm project, of course, is in use today. Our prisons you know have their reforms. I do not know enough to say that those were the very first ones that were ever instituted in this country, but they certainly were very early ones.

Fry: They certainly were. That was 1903. I believe also he instituted a parole system in the old workhouse and pardoned around twelve hundred people. Did you know anything about this?

Field: Yes. I knew it by reading about it and feeling that it was a very noble and right project, but I didn't have any intimate connection with it other than that.

Fry: It wasn't an issue in your church?

Field: Oh, no, it wasn't an issue in our church. The program of Tom Johnson was and became one and was one of the reasons why we finally had to leave, because the rich men in the church always opposed--all wealth opposed all that Johnson was doing, so much so that in the end banks all over the country ganged up against him, as utilities seemed to be threatened more and more in the hands of private owners, but all that I learned there I learned largely from attending these lectures in the tents and reading Progress and Poverty, and later from hearing Eugene Debs, who was also a very great influence in my life.

Fry: But it was not under the Tom Johnson program that Eugene Debs came?

Field: Oh, no, but it seems to me that my mind was then accustomed to linking ideas, and it seemed to me that to the ideas that Henry George had expressed in Progress and Poverty, Debs, who came later, when unions were being formed and were beginning to get a little stronger and were set to protect higher wages and shorter hours eventually, that there had to be added something that socialism had, and which George didn't deal with. His whole idea, as you know, was controlling this imbalance of society by a single tax on property and relieving labor of all tax. But that didn't seem to me enough, because as machines increased and were privately owned, the owners had great power over labor and they could close down, or would close down under difficult conditions and throw much of labor out of work, and I began to see that government control of the machinery was as important as the single tax on land.

Fry: I wonder if you were sophisticated enough at that time to notice whether Tom Johnson followed George's philosophy rather closely or whether he went a little further in any way?

Field: I think to the end of his days he was completely wrapped up in Henry George's philosophy. He was an early disciple of his; he, I think, looked upon him almost as a god who had come to rescue man, and while his policy of public ownership did carry--public ownership of the utilities, of the railways,

- Field: which you know was an issue for years in Cleveland and bitterly fought by wealth and those people who had stock in companies privately owned--still, he was all the time working at this tax problem. Two things: the private ownership of the utilities, which in a way emphasizes some of the teachings of socialism, and his single-tax activities. I think those were as far as Johnson ever went, but heaven knows they were far enough for a man who was in politics, and I think it's marvelous to know that time after time, in spite of all these powers against him, the people put him back in office.
- Fry: This is one thing that would be very interesting to get a picture of. How well attended were his grassroots tent meetings?
- Field: Oh, they were just packed. People turned out--you understand that these were the days before automobiles were many, they had been invented and the number who owned private automobiles was growing, but it was still very small--so people had to come out to them by public transportation and often by walking quite a lot beside, but they came and they filled the tents, and Cleveland was really educated as a city in civic consciousness.
- Fry: Did he have these meetings in the tents primarily for any one particular income level, while he had another type of meeting for another class of people?
- Field: No. He didn't classify them in any way. You might say they were somewhat classified by the district the tent was in, because the people nearest to the tent would go there, so I presume that there were people of one kind in some of the tents and people of another kind in others. But I don't remember any distinction made by him. Meetings were just open to the citizens, and that was all.
- Fry: Why don't you spell out what you did?
- Field: Well, I did very little, so that I feel a little abashed to even mention it. I read and I think digested George's Progress and Poverty, and every now and then Mr. Johnson's secretary or Peter Witt, who was his right-hand man and a brilliant young fellow, would call me up and ask me if I would like to speak to a women's club on the matter. I remember once when a women's club was going to read Spencer's answer to Henry George, which is adverse, he asked me to read that, if I hadn't read it, and be able to reply to it. I blush to think of what my reply must have been, because I was--well, I was not so faltering in speech as I am now, still it was a pretty technical subject for me to go into, but I did go to this club, and fortunately the women didn't know as much as I did. So at least I could tell them

Field: something.

You understand that one of the results of my life in Cleveland was to deepen my sense of the need of the women's vote. We didn't have the vote there, so women weren't of much account. The only reason, I think, that Johnson ever paid any attention to a woman's club was because perhaps he thought that the women might have some influence with their husbands. There was a state effort to get suffrage, and it was my first contact with the suffrage movement. I didn't go into it much, for one reason, I had another child. While I was in Cleveland my daughter was born [1906], and my health was never very strong, and such church duties as I felt willing to undertake kept me quite busy, but it was the general atmosphere of Cleveland and the attendance at the park meetings and the occasional contacts with men like Newton Baker and Peter Witt and others of that type--Fred Howe was another one. He later became our commissioner of immigration under Wilson.

When one is young, mere contacts with thinking minds are much more powerful than the people you contact imagine. They don't know they're making these strong impressions on the young inquiring mind, but they are.

Fry: Can you remember anything about these men to tell us? The sort of impression that they would make on a person when you first saw them or talked to them? Take Fred Howe, for instance?

Field: Well, I don't know that I can really sum up the impressions, other than that they all had this far-seeing and caring-for-society feeling, and I think I was so intensely interested in that that the other characteristics of them were not particularly impressive, or important. I think I liked Newton Baker the least. He had a kind of arrogance which increased greatly as he advanced in politics. He later became the mayor of Cleveland himself, and then he was secretary of war, as you know, under Wilson. As secretary of war I had a very unpleasant contact with him in relation to one of the peace movements, and I just remembered that he was that kind of a man, but also he cared, at least in his youth and before politics really, I think, bit into him more. He worked very hard for Johnson's ideas.

Fry: But he was just getting started them?

Field: Yes, and I want to say again, you who are young and have been born into a time when women are in politics, when they have the power of the vote, I think you can't realize what an obstacle it was to women, not only to action but to learn more, because they didn't have any reason, as it were, or any field to exercise

Field: their interest, and this I kept saying to myself again and again, until women get the vote they're not going to be much of a power in society. I think that Johnson, on the other hand, rather feared the women's vote. I think he thought (as I found later when I went to Oregon that some of the single-taxers did there) that it would retard the progress of the single tax. He thought women were too conservative, more conservative than men. This was what I gathered. Anyway, he was never active in doing anything about women's suffrage. It was one of the few inevitable things to come that, it seems to me, he didn't realize or perhaps wasn't interested enough to try to realize.

Fry: Was his contact with women primarily the clubwomen? Did he ever have any out at his tent meetings?

Field: Yes, he had a good many women come to the tent meetings, lots of them, and young people came. I imagine that there must be among living people today others like myself, who went to those tent meetings and found their future influenced by them. I was glad to see so many young people come, and there were women, but they, as I say, had no chance to vote in the elections that summed up and were really important and carrying out Johnson's ideas. Oh, I can't tell you how that grew on me there. I felt resentful of the lack, you might say, of trust in women, that it showed; the failure to give women the vote was a failure on men's part to trust women in that field of politics.

Albert Ehr Gott and Politics

Fry: What was your husband evolving toward through all this?

Field: Well, he became eventually a Christian Socialist, and that might indicate that he had a liberal mind. Of course, he was liberal in the matter of social relationships, but he was so fanatical in his religious concepts that I think he never really had what you might call a balanced development. On the other hand, as I became more and more thoroughly a citizen of the world and identified with the world's needs, religion began to become to me very much more of a practical thing than of a certain dogmatic faith. I began to grow very definitely away from orthodox Christianity, and he I think went more and more into it. One would have to understand the background of his psychology to really get the picture, and into that I don't try to go. It's too complex. But a psychoanalyst today would soon see what was at battle within him.

Fry: Did he work actively with you in the community, on Tom Johnson's--?

Field: No, he didn't. He objected to my doing that. He thought I ought to confine all my work to the church, and while I did very little, really, beyond it, any time I did he was very disturbed.

But on the other hand, when one wealthy member of our church particularly began to object to the social message that he would put into his sermons, he never budged from that. He really had a very steadfast hold on that, and I think that was because of a doctor in our church, who was an ardent socialist, and also my own views, which he at first was outraged by but began to accept. When the different pamphlets that Dr. Green would send me, or that I would buy, came into the house he would burn them up, and there was a good deal of dissension between us because of this.

There was a growing feeling in those years that I had married into the wrong profession, or into an association with the wrong profession, because I wasn't at heart an orthodox person. The Quaker element in my blood was coming to the front in that side of life, too. All kinds of things were stirring and taking form. They stirred, as you know, in the early contact with the conditions of the Orient, but they began to take form in Cleveland. In every direction. I remember as I look back the feeling of being freed, or a liberalization within myself, a getting away from too much individual concern, and identifying with humanity's concerns, the social concerns, and I think my husband felt I went too far, and he didn't want me to express that beyond what I did in the church.

As a matter of fact, when I was pregnant with my little girl, I began to take great advantage of that by not going to church at all. I found it intolerable, so that when we finally got, you might say, sent away because the rich men and women in the church voted for my husband to resign, I was indifferent to what happened then, because I kept hoping that perhaps he would find some other means of livelihood, but he was too devoted to the ministry, and the Baptist Church in particular, to ever do that.

Fry: Did this ever get to the point where he actually blamed you for his failure in that church?

Field: Oh no, I don't think he ever did. He was to blame me later, and undoubtedly with cause, for many things that happened in Portland, but not there, because he knew that his preaching Christian Socialism, which was a very popular thing in churches in those days--

Fry: It was?

- Field: Yes, it was growing much faster than I would have believed it would.
- Fry: So that it was his own preaching of Christian Socialism that caused the resignation, and he understood this?
- Field: Oh yes, he did. I think that maybe there would have been some truth if the charge had been made, that I was not a good minister's wife, because in the latter years I certainly, except for the kindergarten and the need of helping people that were hungry, had very little to do with the church. I didn't go to the prayer meeting. I often didn't go to the Sunday services, and in those days, that was just--an unforgiveable sin. Minister's wives had to be very active in their husbands' work. I often used to say to my then husband, "It's curious, lawyers' wives don't have to go down to the office and get interested in their cases, and doctor's wives keep out of their husbands' medical life. I don't see why a minister's wife has to always be on deck."
- Fry: Do you want to go on, then, into the other things that occurred in Cleveland? I'd like to know how you met Clarence Darrow. Didn't you meet him while you were in Cleveland?
- Field: Yes, but that will lead into an entirely new phase, and could we save that for our next interview?
- Fry: Yes, certainly. Then we have covered everything?
- Field: Rather badly, I'm afraid, on my part. Now that you've started the subconscious to work, it may be that next time we meet I'll want to add to this, for I feel that it's been very meager considering the real enrichment that I had there. It's very hard to account for the growth in one's life--exactly how it happened, and why--but I know that I really did grow to understanding there in Cleveland.
- Fry: Were you writing any poetry at this time?
- Field: Yes, I was writing a good deal. We had a little church paper and for that I did write. Sometimes poetry, sometimes little brief articles.
- Fry: Do you still have these?
- Field: No, they were all burned up in the Berkeley fire. You see, all that record was brought up by my then husband to Berkeley, where he came to live and have a church, and their house was in that fire, and that's where I lost the book that was signed by Henry

- Field: George, which today would be invaluable. But I feel that the content of it is the thing that counts, and that one can always get.
- Fry: Was there any difference, especially, in your life that the birth of your daughter brought about in Cleveland?
- Field: Well, in the sense that it gave me a good excuse not to have to go to church very much. I don't remember any particular results from it, except the ones that you always have, of joy, in a child, and watching it grow and develop.
- Fry: She was born in what year?
- Field: She was born in 1906.
- Fry: So really you were pretty busy with the two children then?
- Field: Oh, indeed I was, and she was only four, you see, when we left Cleveland.

Tom Johnson

- Fry: Were you able to work for Tom Johnson much after she was born?
- Field: Not much, but as often as possible I kept in contact with everything that was happening, watching the political struggle that went on continuously.
- Fry: Were you aware of the Mark Hanna forces?
- Field: Oh yes, indeed, I was aware of the Mark Hanna forces. I was in the tent when one of the most dramatic occasions of my life occurred. Tom Johnson was speaking, himself, this particular Sunday, and Mark Hanna came into the tent and he stopped short-- Tom Johnson stopped short, and he said, "Here comes the man who uses his public office for private interests, as I've just been explaining." And there a roar went up, I thought they'd tear Mark Hanna to bits, because he was--naturally the liberal forces all detested him. He was a strong Republican, and the leaning in the city among the nonwealthy class was all Democratic, and so that was a moment of intense suspense, you might say.
- Fry: It was a point of great suspense---

- Field: Mark Hanna stopped in the middle of the aisle, and just looked with contempt at the whole audience and at Johnson, and then proceeded to sit down, and he had to listen to quite a long, eloquent lecture on Johnson's part on privilege, private privilege, and the benefits of the single tax, so I felt that was the only time, probably, he had ever had an opportunity to hear something other than Republican doctrine.
- Fry: But it didn't bring him around. He didn't want to give up his railroad company.
- Field: Oh, no. He was determined to put McKinley into office, because he was such a protector of wealth and he wasn't going to let Tom Johnson, whom he hated, at least politically hated, move him to any other kind of decision.
- Fry: This was really your first immersion into any kind of American politics, wasn't it?
- Field: It really was, and I was bewildered by them, in a way, because it seemed to me, I hadn't dreamed that politics could descend to such low methods as, let's say, the privately owned railway people did descend to, bribery and trickery of every kind, in order to defeat Johnson's plans.
- Fry: You were aware of the control of the courts, too, the judicial--?
- Field: I was, through the papers. While of course the Plain Dealer slanted heavily against Johnson, still as one gained knowledge you learned to read through it and to know that there was an answer to much that they presented.
- Fry: This is a big step in maturing politically.
- Field: Yes. I'm glad that I had that, because instead of being overwhelmed by it, and thinking, "This is all dirty politics, I'll keep out of it," it made me more aware than ever that women ought to be in it. I had such intense faith in women that I felt they'd clean things up.
- Fry: Tell me about the viewpoints of other women whom you met in Cleveland, about women's suffrage and politics in general.
- Field: Well, naturally, I began after awhile to attract into my life, through my views, the women who also agreed with me on the suffrage question, and in fact felt it was fundamental. I don't remember any names of outstanding suffragists there. For reasons I've explained, (a lack of strength and time, as a mother, and often with insufficient health) I couldn't go into the suffrage

Field: movement where I would have met the heads of it, but I have to say that I met a great many women who were already aroused to the need for women to have the vote. I don't think of course that anything like the vigorous movement that was to come out of the state-by-state movement as expressed by the Women's Party, of which we ought to talk later, had dawned on them then. They just thought if they could get it in Ohio it would help, let's say, Michigan then to get it.

Fry: But there was no particular groundswell then?

Field: No. It was just beginning, I think, to grow in Ohio. Ohio was, had been, a highly conservative state, and that's why it was so amazing that a man like Tom Johnson, who was nothing short of a prophet, should have not only risen to power but be kept so long in power by the people. Usually, you know, they crucify their prophets.

Fry: How did Tom Johnson strike you when you looked at him?

Field: He had a bulky, rather heavy body, but he had a beautiful face, very fine, high brow, indicating a man of thought, and one of the kindest smiles I think I've ever seen. He would also always plunge almost immediately into those questions that were dearest to him. I think there has been no biography, that I have seen, that's adequate yet. I'm surprised, because I don't think that in any city there was ever such a mayor, before or since, that was so utterly devoted to principles, not just to the, you might say, passing needs of the city, as our mayors are today, picking up, well, let's say matters that have to do with the park commission or the health commission, but to very deeply fundamental things, that I don't think I have known any other mayor to do. And Tom Johnson was not a happy man in his married life. That's never been brought out in one biography; you'd think that everything was well, but his family little by little practically deserted him, certainly deserted him in spirit, and he was a very lonely man.

Fry: At the time you knew him?

Field: Yes. There was one woman friend, whose name I've always known but alas, at this moment can't think of, in our next interview we'll come back to that, who was in his life and helped him a great deal, but that's the only one of whom I know. Of course, he had these loyal young men advocates under him, and so well were they indoctrinated that whenever they held other positions they always infused any position they had with the same kind of spirit and they executed their offices with always this underlying basis of what they'd gained from Johnson.

- Fry: But his own wife and children never went along with him, you mean?
- Field: No. They were angry at him, because he put most of his money into his social projects, and they were snubbed in society because all the wealthy people were against Johnson, and they began to be left out of the social register. That was, of course, to them something that he was to blame for.
- Fry: Well, yes, he was completely sensitive to the need to educate the public, but he seemed to have failed to bring along his own family.
- Field: Yes, he did. I think, from what I've heard, they were pretty stupid. I doubt if they would have understood his views at all. But I think also he may not have made much of an effort. I don't think he had any really what you would call close relationships with his family, with his wife or with his children.
- Fry: This may be why he felt that women were rather conservative. You said that this other friend of yours who was the only really close woman friend that he had--
- Field: Yes, I think so. I think that is very often the basis of a man's judgment of women--the women in his own life--and it may have been that that was why Johnson ignored the suffrage question. But I think it's more likely explained by a man who was an ardent single-taxer in Oregon, later when I went there and got deeply into the suffrage movement, and he came into my office one day and said to me, "I want to tell you something. I've had a real battle with my conscience. I think that women's suffrage will set the single-tax movement and any other allied social movement back very far, but I think that suffrage is right, and therefore I'm going to vote for it."
- Well, Johnson didn't have that emphasis at all. He was too anxious for single-tax to go through, and you know from your own background reading how he had the city mapped out with every single lot in the city evaluated, and that was a tremendous job. He paid every bit of it himself.
- Fry: At its true value?
- Field: Yes, its real value, as he called it. And taxed on that basis.
- Fry: This was bound to put a lot of people against him and make many enemies. I wanted to ask you, Sara, if your church congregation, as a whole, was behind Johnson. You said that the congregation in your church was primarily rather poor people.

- Field: Yes, they were. I think the struggle for existence with them was so great they didn't pay much attention to the politics in the city. I think only the few people in the church who were against Johnson paid any attention to it, and perhaps it was just as well under the circumstances, because if people in the church had been vocally advocating their adherence to Johnson, they would have probably cut off the funds that they let me have for the free kindergarten and the free kitchen.
- Fry: As it was, when you actually met your Waterloo, was this a popular vote in the church, or was it just the wealthy?
- Field: I think that it was not exactly popular. I think that it seemed to be expedient by such of the poor people who cared about the church surviving. You see, most of the churches in the poorer districts of Cleveland were folding up, and the very loyal members among the less affluent ones would have felt that while they liked my husband, if they did, that it wasn't wise for him to stay pastor any longer, with the division that was there, because I know of some who were certainly for Johnson but they didn't like to speak out and say very much.
- Fry: It was a matter of self-preservation, then, I guess?
- Field: Very much so.
- Fry: And it was after this was voted upon, then, that you got the message that you were to go to Oregon?
- Field: Oh yes, but may we take that up next time?
- Fry: Yes, that'll be fine.
- [end of interview]

XII INFLUENCES TOWARD SOCIALISM

[March 13, 1961]

Remedies for Inequity

Fry: Sara, you told me off the tape the other day that when you were living in Cleveland, you went to school in two ways.

Field: Yes, I did. Although perhaps it can't be divided, but I have emphasized only one part of it, which was more on the economic and social side, because that had been the major question that had never been answered in my mind, and the other had been a growth away from orthodoxy, from Christian orthodoxy, for reasons that I would like to speak of directly.

I would like to say again that it takes imagination to recognize how exciting it was to discover there were men dedicated to the idea of a remedy. I hadn't met those men. I had met a few who deplored poverty, but they never had any panacea, as it were, for it, or a real deep surgery, you might say, that could cut out the sore that was causing it, and meeting those men for the first time, such as Tom Johnson and Henry George--when I say meeting them, I mean becoming acquainted with them, but that wasn't so much as reading their books and in Tom Johnson's case going to his talks at tent meetings. I then was overwhelmed with joy that there were such men as that, and when young Peter Witt put into my hands Henry George's Progress and Poverty, it is impossible to imagine my exultation on opening it to find that as a subtitle to Progress and Poverty, he had written, "An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depression and of the Increase in Want with the Increase in Wealth," and then in large letters the remedy. Here was a man who dared to try to attack the momentous problem.

It went particularly deep with me at that time, because we were in the midst of one of the worst depressions, perhaps

Field: the worst that the country has ever known. I've forgotten over what period it lasted; I know in 1903, it was very bad. And of course I also, then, met Tom Johnson, who had read this great book, which had been out many years and sold millions of copies, but unknown to me, and he had fallen under the influence of him, had become a disciple of George's, and I had the great joy of hearing Henry George speak twice at the tent meetings during the years I was there. He couldn't come oftener because he was called at that time, all over the country. People appreciated that he had gone deeply into this question and had offered a wise enough program to command the attention of the educated people. I think it was put in all the colleges at that time, and I feel very sad that I hadn't read it long before.

Of course, you must remember I was in my early twenties, and I had been more interested in literature than anything else, except that this question like a borer within me was always there. What is it that causes this imbalance of society, this terrible imbalance, the few with too much and the many with nothing or too little? So that is why I think I had spent more time on that, but I also read the books of a man who was an extremely--what shall I say?--popularized, bad word, because it wasn't as if he had written a sex novel or something (they weren't written [in] those days), but he was extremely important to people who were reading now on the social question, and that was George Herron, who was a professor at the University of Iowa, I think, at one time, president--I'm not sure of that, but he began to show that the church was supporting and sustaining an evil system, a system that was just as antagonistic to the doctrines of Jesus as a church could be. There are many marvelous paragraphs that I could quote in this book, but one I remember, struck me as a spear might, and that was, "the word money has become more important to the rank and file of our people than the word Jesus." In his many books, which he wrote and which at that time were well read, he exposed the falsity of the church's position on the social problem. It was these books that I put into the hands of my husband, and that finally made a Christian Socialist out of him. I think that Herron himself went much farther than Christian Socialism--

Fry: This was his book Between Caesar and Jesus?

Field: That was one of his books. There was another one called The Social Meanings of Religious Experience, and several others which at the time I think I did not read but I should have. One called New Redemption, one called The Christian Society, and so forth. He was denounced everywhere, I mean outside those few who were impressed by his arguments and his message and accepted it, and I think it did start a very small movement

Field: among the religious people, that is among church people, of Christian Socialism. I believe it would have grown had it not been that, as usual, the interests bore down heavily. He [Herron] was asked to resign from the University of Iowa, where he made a living by being called by such people as Graham Taylor, the supreme leader of social settlement work in Chicago, for a series of lectures. I think it must have been my sister (who worked in the social settlement movement in and around that time or a little later) who introduced me to these books, and I in turn introduced them to my husband.

The arguments in them were so powerful that, though my husband was not--my then husband, I would rather put it, because looking back I can see we had not very much in common--my then husband couldn't help but be deeply moved by them. I think at heart, he didn't have the compassion I had, and he hadn't been ridden by this matter of the poor as I had been, but he had heard enough and he saw the depression as it crept right into the church itself, and he then preached some sermons based on the contents of Herron's books. This was what led to our being dismissed from the church. Everybody lost their positions that in any way advocated these doctrines, for they were firmly against all privilege and you know how privilege rises like a monster to crush all those who question it in any way.

A Disagreement with Orthodoxy

But he did not in any way change what I would call the anatomy of his fanaticism, as regards orthodox religion. He adhered entirely to the old doctrines while preaching these, you might say--

Fry: New applications?

Field: New applications of it, in the social field.

An outstanding example of this was a case of a young girl in our church, who had been seduced by a wealthy young man and then deserted when she was going to have a baby. All the sympathies of my training up to date and of my natural maternal feeling came to the front, and I said, "A child is a child of God, whether it's born with some words said over it in a church or not," to my husband, and he became very angry and said, "No, she had broken the moral law and must be put out of the church."

There were solemn meetings over this poor young thing, who

Field: was in desperation, and all my fury really arose, and I think this was the beginning of my realization that, fundamentally, in spite of the fact that he had become broader along the social line, that fundamentally, in our views of life and our attempts to live it, we were not together.

I remember there was one woman in our church who was extremely progressive, and even radical, as I look back on it now, though I think she didn't know any more how to express it than I had known, but I went to her and told her the situation. She was fortunately a woman of some means, not wealthy, but her husband had a very excellent business and there was plenty there, and his business had not been hurt--one of the few--by the depression.

I told her the whole story, and I said, "What is this girl to do?" And she said, "I will take her into my own home, and she shall be taken care of and then we can place the child in some good home and she can get work again." I remember feeling how sad it was that I, who wanted to bring her into my own home, poor as we were--for our salary was very low--had to go to another who was almost a stranger to me to find any kind of understanding and, you might say, practical sympathy.

But the girl did go there, and was tenderly taken care of by this lady, and all went well. A good family adopted the child, because she couldn't possibly--in those days of course it was much harder for women to get adequate work, especially to support a child, besides herself, than it is now. So, with agony, she gave the child up, and finally, through the help of others, the details of which I can't quite now remember, she got work again.

But this left a sting in my heart, a sore in my heart that never healed, and was only one of many differences, one of which I think I related, of a long time ago when we were in Rangoon--the denial of communion to two wonderful people, who were so much better in their living than we were and in their kindness and consideration, that I felt outraged, and so I began to examine the orthodox aspect of the church, and found I had no sympathy with it. I was growing away from it. I wasn't growing away from the teachings of Christ, but I indeed remembered, and I even called my husband's attention to the woman at the well, where He said, "Let him who hath no sin among you throw the first stone," and they slunk away.

I said to my husband, and I remember these very words, because it made him very angry, "We're slinking away from the same problem when we desert this girl, and the church deserts this girl." I said, "If we only did it personally I wouldn't feel as sad as I do that the church does, because it's

Field: against all Christ's teaching." And he said, Oh no, it wasn't the moral law. Christ upheld the moral law and we had to follow it.

Well, by this time I had learned that you couldn't just have an opinion that was based on emotional feeling or a single case, without examining its cause, and I began to read books, such as these of Herron's, and others whose names I can't remember. But they were renegades from the church in those days, because the social situation was very much to the front.

Eugene Debs

I would like to have some scholar tell me why the depression of 1903 seemed to cause people to think about social conditions more than the depression of the '30s.

Fry: Maybe we needed a Eugene Debs in the '30s.

Field: I was just going to say that I think for one reason we didn't have any great leader in the '30s, such as we had had in Debs at that time--he was traveling all over the country, and lectured everywhere.

There was another man, with no college education, but he was self-educated. He was a co-engineer on a freight train, and when his time to go off duty came, instead of going to sleep as his tired body might have suggested, he read. And for years he read. And he became an ardent advocate of socialism.

Fry: Did you meet him in Cleveland?

Field: Yes, I'll speak of that directly. I want to get his background a little bit, because I think he isn't so well known today. He was a man not only of infinite compassion like Lincoln, but he even looked like Lincoln--long and lanky, homely, as we'd say, except that his face was so full of kindness and feeling. I remember when later I heard him speak and met him, seeing that his hands even looked like the hands of Lincoln in portraits that I had studied, because of course Lincoln, as he is to so many, is a hero of mine. He prepared himself thoroughly for years before he went on a platform, and you must remember that the socialism of that day had no taint of dictatorship or a denial of the other freedoms that we already possessed.

I remember that when I met Colonel Wood later, he said to

Field: me, "One of the greatest faults of our founding fathers was that they did not recognize that the lack of economic justice would become one of the most crying needs. They only remembered the cruel treatment in England when any words were spoken against existing order, and so they centered on the ideas of free speech and free thought, and those necessary things. But they didn't get at the foundation of society, which is economic justice and economic freedom, and that battle has got to be fought.

And you can see what a prophet he was, for he said that years before the Russian Revolution. And with the Russian Revolution we see the result of our not attempting a socialistic solution here before a totalitarian power took over and made it hateful--because it began to suppress all the freedoms we had gained. And if it should be, as heaven knows it's now feared it may be, the overcoming influence of this world, why we shall have temporarily lost the original bases of freedom for which all of our ancestors fought and which we would like to have kept here.

Debs knew that and he preached this. He asked not even for himself--lots of the papers who hated him and criticized him, said of course he wants to be a dictator. This was before the word dictator had become hateful through Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and such men as that, and now Khrushchev. And yet it was a hated word, even so. Nobody wanted a dictator in America. Perhaps the great monopolists felt that even to mention such a thing might mean havoc for them.

But anyway, Debs preached clean, parliamentary socialism. Partly because he was so persuasive, with knowledge to back him up, and partly from his personality, he won the largest vote that's ever been won by a candidate for the socialists. He had three million votes, in whatever that year was that would come during the time of the depression. What was that year?

Fry: 1904.

Field: I think though it was even four years later, or else he ran again, because it seems to me--we left Cleveland in 1910, and my memory is that I heard him before then. But I may have been confusing the fact that he came, and perhaps I didn't hear him. The time I remember hearing him, the hall in Cleveland was so jam packed that they had to do what was then unprecedented and put chairs on the platform.

I had decided to take my little son, Albert, there because he was a very aware and alive child, and I had the feeling that

Field: all his life he would like to be able to say, "I heard Eugene Debs." So we got there a little late and had to sit on the platform and he had to sit on my lap because of the lack of chairs. And after Debs's marvelous speech, which won deafening applause, he turned, of course, to leave and he saw this child sitting there on my lap, or else we were standing together--I can't remember which, because it seems to me we gave him a standing ovation. But he came over and put his hand on Albert's head, and he said, "Young man, may you live to see these wrongs that I have talked about tonight righted." Later, when the poets were all asked to contribute to a book called Debs and the Poets [1920] (a copy of which I had and I can't find anywhere), it was this incident that I spoke of, and that he was looking to the future even if he didn't see a chance for an immediate solution of the problem that he thought he had the remedy for.

In Debs and the Poets, I did tell of this. Not all the poets, but a great many of the poets of the period who had prophetic eyes also contributed.

In 1917, after definite promises that he [Wilson] would take no part in any trade war, which Wilson conceded was the basis of the First World War, as did many thinking people--a rivalry between Britain and Germany for a trade route to India, [he] then reneged on it and in the last year put us into the war. Debs went on a rather fierce tour, fierce in his opposition to our entry and to our boys being sacrificed for such a thing as this. Of course, the propaganda had to be stepped up, and they made the emperor out a devil. The emperor was not a devil and had none of the cruel and dictatorial--

Fry: You mean the kaiser?

Field: Yes, the kaiser, excuse me.

The kaiser did want power, he did want expansion for his people, but he had no, I think, such dreams of world power or world domination, or certainly of world dictatorship, that Hitler and Mussolini had, and since that time the Russian dictators, had. I think all historians, examining that war, agree that it was largely a trade war.

So Debs went out on his tour of opposition, and of course he was put in jail for opposition to the war, for speaking against it. Thousands and, I would say, into tens of thousands rose up in protest, and the poets, in order to do something, compiled this book of Debs and the Poets.

Fry: Was this a money-raising thing, or just something to help public opinion?

Field: The book? Well, if it was a money-raising thing it was a rather hopeless task, because poetry never makes money. But it may have been for that, or it may have just been that they wanted to show their sympathies to the president and to the authorities generally, of people of distinction, because there were many poets of distinction who contributed to that book.

Fry: This is the poetic way of passing a resolution?

Field: Exactly. And we didn't content ourselves with that alone. Most of us wrote letter after letter to the president in protest, and letters to the papers, and any research of that period (which of course has been made) would show how loved and revered and honored Debs was.

He took his jail sentence with great equanimity. He didn't cease to work from jail. I think perhaps he was one of the most powerful influences in my life because he combined the knowledge of Henry George and Johnson and other liberals to whom I had been listening at the tent meetings, he combined it with a sense of identification with the people personally. Anyhow, I feel that he was the man of the hour and I could wish that we would have another socialist leader rise, because I feel the time is ripe to oppose dictator socialism, which they call communism, with pure communism, which is only to get those things which belong to all men under government control so that the monopolists cannot possess them, and that has to come or we'll go down, because our society will rot under this condition of want in the midst of abundance.

Of course, you might say that we are changing. All these social security acts seem to belie any idea that we are going on the old way. We're not, because we can't, and we know we can't, but we're still trying to use what the people who promoted soup kitchens and such things did--palliatives. We're not getting at the real deep root of the matter.

Fry: Providing more jobs, to help the economy--?

Field: I should say.

I would like to put a plug in here, as it seems--though it's not with any sense of anything but feeling that he was one of our prophets--a plug for my husband's writing. I was reading over some of his Earthly Discourse and Heavenly Discourse, apropos of meeting Mr. Roscoe tomorrow night. I hear he's an ardent advocate of my husband's writing. He feels he was one of our few great prophets. I would really like to say that it's so available to the public at large because it's written sometimes with humor and

Field: always with a sense of love. And this feeling, in Heavenly Discourse--while he said many things that the orthodox hated and that put it off the masses' bookstands for a while (I mean the popular bookstands)--the unflagging devotion to the teachings of Jesus are so apparent that it brings back the works of this man Herron, who never departed from that either, though he became a great enemy of the status quo and of the capitalistic system.

Fry: Well, Sara, I was reading some Eugene Debs the other day, old speeches of his, and they sound so vigorous and so fiery, I was trying to imagine how it would be to actually hear him.

Field: You can't imagine how it was. It was, I would say, magnetic, except that that carries an impression of some kind of mystery or unknown thing. It was only the magnetism which I think true love always can have. I think sincere love is almost instantly felt. He could hardly come on the platform without [one's] feeling that he was one of the people, and that his life was of no particular value except as he could aid the furtherance of what would be helpful to the masses. I think, too, that what you'd feel, and couldn't see (I wish you could have, Chita)--it was the way that he lectured. Before he got through, he was almost doubled in two, to get near to his audience. He would move forward little by little, as if it were an actual physical bodily expression of his sense of unity with the people, and he would plead with them to see their own interests, and for the sake not only of themselves and of their children, but of the world itself. He knew that we couldn't exist forever on a system so wrong, and he didn't want to see this country destroyed, he didn't want to see the principles for which our forefathers had lived done away with. He simply wanted to have a deeper principle added.

Fry: He wasn't superimposing anything that wouldn't fit on what they already had?

Field: No. And you can see how today anything that is proposed to make life a little easier and better for the people is immediately called socialism. Well, it is an approach to socialism. It's an approach to it, but it's still not getting to the very root of the trouble.

Fry: I was wondering what you did besides listen to Eugene Debs. Did you read him a great deal in Cleveland, and did you introduce him to your husband, too? I mean, introduce Debs' ideas?

Field: No, he didn't go with me that night. It may have been that he had a church meeting and couldn't, but he didn't go with me.

- Field: This is what makes me think he [Eugene Debs] must have come in to the latter part of our stay in Cleveland rather--
- Fry: You mean in the 1908 campaign?
- Field: Yes. But the depression was still memorable, and he could draw upon the lessons of that, as an evidence that capitalism would always have these periodic depressions, as it has. Every thirty years, you see, we have one. We've had a lesser one this year, but it's thirty years again. We had one in '33, and we had one--that was just thirty years ago, a little more--and then again, they don't like to call it anything but a recession this time, but look at the depressed areas! Look at the unemployed! Kennedy sees it, but he doesn't see the root of the matter any more than any of other of our politicians do. I think he really believes that capitalism can, with wise leadership, accomplish what I know very well it can't, because it hasn't the right basis for it.
- Fry: We need certain basic services.
- Field: Absolutely.
- Fry: And sources of production put under government control.

The Influence of George Herron

- Field: I'd like to read you something that I have marked in here.
- Fry: I was going to ask you to read something in the Herron books that was particularly influential--
- Field: Well, I see I've marked "My Creed." This was when I, these books were much more--
- Fry: You could just record the pages here if you want to.
- Field: You know, it's curious, here I was to meet a philosophical anarchist later, and I said in this funny old little-girl writing which I still have, where he was talking about--he said, crudely and inadequately as I interpret him: "I prefer to stand before you simply as an interpreter of Jesus, as an advocate of the ideal in human relations. The world is not yet ready for an economy of society that shall incarnate the principles of his teaching. Men are not yet sufficiently emancipated from fear, from faith in evil and material force to trust the law and liberty of love, but we will come to it at last, this

Field: deathless love, perhaps after we have tried to figure everything to bring forth the social rest of the [inaudible] progress." But that isn't the reason--just be patient with me. Have you got time?

Fry: What had you written on that?

Field: On that I had written--I didn't know I knew anything about--It seems to me that Mr. Herron was a Christian philosophical anarchist, to coin a phrase. But I think this other--it's very brief. I had just begun putting these [bookmarks] in for you. Oh, everything went haywire. I don't see anything else.

Fry: This is his book Between Caesar and Jesus?

Field: And then there's another, equally important. I imagine everything he's written--though I don't seem to remember the others so well, and I can't find them. Ah, "My Creed."

Fry: What page is this on?

Field: Page 244. And I'd like to read it to you.

Fry: Good. Read it.

Field: Well, this isn't part of the--

Fry: Would you like for me to read it, while you rest a minute?

Field: No, I'm all right. I'm going to test myself as to how long I can go without--

Fry: Well, Sara, let's don't make an Olympic try of this.

Field: Well, he's been giving the ideal of life which Jesus lifted into eternal view, he said, which is the ideal of all the dreamers [inaudible] as not only practicable and predestined to be realized. "I believe that any other ideal is impracticable and is a collision with human destiny and God." Now books are coming out that can act as more accurate and scientific, you might say, interpretators of this. ([Explains audible thumps]) That's just [inaudible name] putting the wood in the woodbox.) "This ideal is not only no mere dream, but the lack of it makes the whole human history an experience, a monstrous dream in the night. Following this ideal as our social vision we shall find ourselves at last in the universal communism and liberty which are the outcome of obedience to the law of love." And, you see, that universal communism would just horrify, as you know, the anti-Reds today. But you and I know what he means by that.

Field: Just living as brothers. And this is what I marked, "My Creed."
 "With this confession of faith, therefore, with Christ's kingdom of Heaven as the only social goal I can see, I am yet ready to follow any man or to work with any program or to march in any camp that will take but the blindest single step towards making way for the organizing and evolutionizing power of the peace of good-will among men."

Now you see, strains of this will harmonize with Erskine's point of view, who said, "I take any wagon going my way." He knew that society achieved these vast changes only by evolution, step by step by step. Sometimes, as he put it, in nature the leaf evolves to a point where [words uttered rapidly] suddenly it bursts open. That's a revolution, then, at the very end. Society has stood as long as it could, the conditions--and it bursts into, you might say, into the--when I say the bloom of revolution don't think I don't know how horrible it can be, but I mean the necessity for change. But anyway, it's all very strange, this curious kind of--as if Erskine and I were really together a continent apart, thinking the same way. He's a much greater person, and naturally could express it better than I, but there it was.

Fry: And you had marked this as your creed quite early, really. You were still in Cleveland?

Field: Would you like to look this over?

Fry: Yes, I would.

Field: Because it's so advanced. Of course, this, you understand, here's a professor--I don't know whether he was a professor or not, I'm sure I did know, but you can't hold everything in your life. But anyway, most of what he says is not what the classicist or the academic mind would say was an adequate treatise, but it's not trying to do that, it's showing the differences between the attitude of the church and the attitude of Jesus. But in showing the attitude of Jesus, it brings out so much of the socialistic idea. I thought you'd like to see it. And there's this marvelous quotation from Plato at the front which I wish you would read. You may, of course, probably have read Plato--

Fry: Oh, these were the lectures Herron gave at the University of Chicago.

Field: Yes, those were. Then these were given at a course of lectures prepared for the Settlement School of Social Economics, held by Professor Graham Taylor, D.D.C., of social economics, of

Field: Chicago Commons, August 22-29, 1893. I was a young girl, I was not out of high school then; oh, yes, I was. It was the first one.

Fry: And this one's 1898.

Field: Going to India, and going through all the troubles I had, I suppose I had missed these. I hadn't begun to think about them enough.

Now, I've been given for Christmas a book by one of the leading French scientists. I can't understand most of it and I'm happy to say that my attorney (who's a great reader and calls Alfred Russell his master, Lord Russell)--I'm glad to say he couldn't either, and he's got a better mind than I have anyway. But this man, beginning with the very early data, scientifically--underneath there, darling, there. [Pointing]

Fry: Oh, Teilhard de Chardin?

Field: Yes. I'm just dying to read it. Because he shows how, in the evolution of the actual--he does justice to the evolutionary background of the structure of man's body and all that, but he shows how, later, the phenomenon of man is this: that love came into his being, not just the animal love of--well, let's say, a male for his mate, or a female for her pups, which she soon forgets, as you know, after they're able to fend for themselves, but how it expressed itself in this universal love that is beginning to be felt more and more: how we care. Why should I care about somebody in India that I don't know about?

And this is the phenomenon of man. I mean, that's what he works up to, and I'd give my right eye to be able to read the whole thing, but it's such hard going, because he's such a great scientist, and, you see, the scientist hasn't yet learned how--C.P. Snow complained that the literary person didn't know science, that the scientific man knew more about literature, for instance, than the literary man knew about science. Well, why do they talk another language? We don't talk--I mean, literary people don't talk another language.

Fry: Yes, they use the prevailing language.

Field: And this is another scientific language. It's just terrific.

But when he comes to the spiritual energy and how the birth of thought and then this beautiful and great and phenomenal thing of love entered the heart, I'd like to certainly get the background of it, because I can't talk sensibly without it.

- Fry: This follows up, then, on what you've been reading?
- Field: Yes, that's what I was going to say. Now this man had all these same feelings about universal love that we should have--this man Herron, but he wouldn't convince a scientist reading it. I mean, I don't know how many have been convinced by this man. I talked to Clark, who's majoring in philosophy, and he said, "Well, this was an aspect of science today, what they call the humanistic aspect towards science." He's going into the scientific aspect of it. "Well," I said, "my God, if there's anything more scientific than this book I'd like you to show it to me."
- Fry: Sara, would you like to mention the settlements at Chicago, and tell us what Mary was doing at this time, in Maxwell Street, and talk about Graham Taylor? We haven't taped that yet.
- Field: Well, you'd better let me do that next time, because I brought back some notes from the East that I'd like to look over, and I don't know just where they are. I got [inaudible] notebook, and I'll hunt it up and I'll be delighted, because she was really a very brave girl.
- Fry: I remember you wanted to mention the incident of her protecting a little child--
- Field: Yes. A young girl, not a little child. She was utterly unprotected when her brother was arrested. Well, I would rather refresh myself on the details, so as to get that right--I'm so afraid in this that I'm going to get things wrong, and that doesn't make them have any value at all, and I want to get it right.
- I think I've done pretty well today.
- Fry: You certainly have.
- Field: I've been full of the whole thing. But I haven't gotten down much to the religious, after all, have I? I said I was going to talk about the change in my religious views.
- Fry: Well, this brought about your change. What you've been saying and leading up to is that your whole beliefs evolved to the point where the church was not as important as the actual application of Jesus's teachings--
- Field: That is, the dogmas of the church, and its general organization for merely, you might say, teaching moral precepts without applying them to social needs. Those were the things, and this incident that I gave of the girl that was going to be put out of the church--

A Rift Begins

- Fry: This made a pretty great gulf between you and Albert, and you felt this very keenly and very deeply. I should ask you, did Albert feel this? Did he feel this gulf widening between you at this point, do you think?
- Field: He was unhappy to be in so many--well, I don't like to use the word quarrels, because they weren't over little things. They were differences of opinion, and I was young and fiery and I suppose I lost my temper a great deal. I haven't any idea, that I was anything but a little devil, because I felt this thing so deeply. And he was really--he wasn't a very smart man, darling, he was a little stupid.
- Fry: He simply didn't have the power to grasp--
- Field: He'd have been just nuts for a psycho--just a cup of tea for the psychoanalysts, because, I think I explained way back that all of his brothers had been very successful in other lines and he hadn't. Well, he wasn't smart enough. He'd only worked as an accountant in a very large glass factory, until this young rabid minister, a kind of refined Billy Sunday, got hold of him and persuaded him that he was just made to be a minister. I think his view of getting up on a platform, being able to talk and becoming somebody--I mean this is my now analysis of why his mind remained so strangely involved with himself always. He was terribly involved with himself.
- Fry: But he did take this unpopular stand on Christian socialism?
- Field: Yes, he did. There he came through.
- Fry: But still he was pretty unhappy, then, with your evolution, I guess?
- Field: He took it without any break with his orthodox belief, whereas with me, there had to be a complete break with the old orthodoxy.
- Fry: You could see how it just didn't fit together, and he was just kind of adding something and putting it over here in a corner?
- Field: That's right. He had seen with his own eyes what the depression was doing, and couldn't avoid wanting to change conditions. I think that, and I think I said so at the time, I hope this will--I'll have a chance to--I don't want to deflate him in too great

Field: a way, because it was brave of him to get up and preach these things in the face of these few men, who just got furious at him. And after all, there it was, our livelihood depended on it, and he had two children by this time and a wife, and I'm glad to say I don't think we ever thought about that part of it. I mean, in that respect we knew it was right, and I respect him for that, I do really. If his nature had been different, but he was not really in any sense of the name--I don't mean in the world sense, darling, I mean in the sense of character--he wasn't a great man, in spite of this that sounds as if he were. This was I think the bravest thing he ever did.

As a matter of fact, when he came out here, he didn't; he began to soft pedal it [his Socialist view], I mean just little by little.

Fry: Pulled in his horns?

Glimpses of Colonel Wood

Field: Um-hum. It was I who ruined his career in Portland, because of my growing intimacy with a man who was considered an atheist and a profligate and a--I don't know what, even while he was asked to make all the great after-dinner speeches and meet the celebrities that came. It was the queerest combination you ever knew. I never knew such a man in my life as that man [Colonel Wood]. It wasn't he was doublefaced. It was just that he had always the desire to be able to help--he'd talk to these men just the same way. He'd talk to James Hill, the big railroad man, in the same way, and the only reason that--I've told you, or I'll tell you now, how Mr. Wilcox (I remember that name well), who was one of his most influential--I'm talking about Erskine now--clients and who had a great big grain business and whose lawyer he was--

Fry: Whose lawyer he was?

Field: Yes. And Wilcox came to him one day and said, "Look here, Wood, you're going around talking everything that's against the way of life that we all live by and that we believe in. We want you to stop." And Erskine got--he didn't often get mad, but when he did, by Jove, there was certainly thunder and storm.

Fry: I'll bet it was the wrath of Jupiter.

Field: He said, "Wilcox, are you trying to tell me what to believe and

Field: what to say?" And Wilcox said, "Well, I'm telling you what not to say. You go down to those labor unions and you talk and you stir them all up and you just make trouble in this city. If you want to remain as our attorney, you'll have to quit." And Erskine was simply furious. He said, "So you're trying to buy me off. Take your old business; I don't want it."

I mean, you see, it was a curious thing. He had, as he said, to play the game of economics as he found it, but he kicked against the rules all the time. It was that kicking against the rules that--well, Wilcox never took it away from him, because he was the smartest lawyer and the most able lawyer; he'd won more cases of a large nature, involving millions sometimes, of any attorney in Portland. It was--you just ought to get that book [on Portland; it] hasn't got much about him in it but it's interesting and it comes from such a source, John--who's the man who goes around writing about each city--?

Fry: Gunther?

Field: Gunther. On Portland, he said he [Colonel Wood] was the only man in Portland that was worth anything, or something. I think he speaks of this ability to understand. He has to live and support a family, but all the time he is doing this very thing--he's trying to say this isn't the right way for any of us to live.

Now, Emma Goldman thought he ought to forsake all and follow Christ, so to speak. She didn't believe in Christ, but that was the idea. But he said, "Emma, how do you know I'm not doing more good among a people you could never reach?" And that was true.

Fry: Well, also, he was in a society which had well-established rules that he pretty well had to live by.

Field: That's what he said. He said, "I was born into a world where the rules were all made, economically, and in order to live I have to play that. But I never cease saying they should be changed.

Fry: But he couldn't pretend they didn't exist?

Field: No. And he never did pretend that they didn't. No profit to himself, no possible loss of a client--a rich client--nothing kept him. He was chosen. As I say, he was the only man in Portland, really, that--oh, God, I wish you'd known him, because you'll think I'm so prejudiced.

Fry: Oh, I wish I could have.

Field: But I'm not the only one. You ask Jim Caldwell about him.

Fry: I did. He told me so much.

Field: Well, he spoke to these bankers at this bankers' convention. What do you think he talked to them about? The inevitable ultimate organization of society which would be philosophical anarchism.

Well, of course, I often wonder just how many of them--

Fry: I'll bet that was one dinner they didn't eat very much!

Field: And he told them how we'd have to pass through this state. You see, socialism wasn't, in his idea, that ultimate--I mean, an evolutionary goal. He thought, because he knew very well--well, if you read my introduction to the collected poems, you know, I tried so hard to tell what he believed in.

But he didn't see how, if there was to be any approach to man's perfection of soul, he wouldn't be able to govern himself. You see, anarchism to most means just throwing up everything. Well, it doesn't mean throwing up everything; that sounds as if you were sick at your stomach. No, it means that you have digested everything else that's come along, all the changes, and have grown, just as your boys are growing, in wisdom and stature, as it was said of Jesus, [and] that you finally grow to a place where you can govern yourself and you don't need all this government.

Fry: So much external government?

Field: Too much government. But I remember when I came to Portland and we met and something was said--someone else said something at the first dinner party where I ever met him, and I said, "Oh, you can't talk to me about that. I'm just a confirmed socialist."

And he looked at me with his most wonderful smile. "That's all right for the present. You'll ultimately become a philosophical anarchist."

Fry: Socialism is just a means?

Field: A means. But you see, he would have helped any socialistic-- You see, many people criticized me for the introduction that I made in the collected poems because it was too cold. They said, "Knowing your wonderful relationship, we were expecting from you something much more--" And I said, "I was trying so

Field: hard to be objective, and just consider his ideas and not his relationship with me, or let anything else creep in." And I said, "I'm sorry if it seems cold, but after all when you're talking about ideas, you don't want to get emotional."

Fry: Well, the purpose of that introduction was to explain the man.

Field: The man, yes, and to explain--I knew, with firm conviction, which is slowly being realized, that some day his great poem, The Poet in the Desert, would be considered like one of the Old Testament prophecies. It's got all the prophetic ideas way ahead of this time, plus beauty--the beauty of the sound. Well, his own beauty. I knew that that would be an important book some day, and now look how Jo [Josephine] Miles spoke of it as one of the important books in the new poetry, as she put it.

Every now and then I get a letter from some college that, say, may have put it in as an integral part of the course in modern poetry, and so on. Well, knowing that, I wanted to explain why there had been so many different editions of it. He never was satisfied, you see, and it would get printed before he was finally through with it. And then everybody gets mixed up. They have different copies of it. So the one I included was the one he finally approved, and which if he'd listened to me the Vanguard would have published. I've got hundreds of copies of the Vanguard publication of it. It was first published privately by him. Max Eastman and I went over it carefully together and suggested changes which he was willing to make, and then that was brought out by himself in a little paper edition which Emma Goldman sold at her meetings, because it could sell for 25 cents. I begged him, when the Vanguard wrote and said, "We want to bring out now a publication of that," not to go to work changing it but, in his introduction, while he doesn't mention me as I would not let him, he says, "In spite of my best critic, I have made some changes in this poem, because," he said, "I believe so firmly that the bluejay must be a bluejay, even if he screeches, and we must obey what is our impulse."

And after it was there in print in the book, he said, "My God, why didn't I listen to you?" You see, what I was working at was for him to take out some of the propaganda because it was overpowering, whereas the poetry said it more. For instance, when he said that wonderful line that's now quoted, "Change is the breathing of the universe." Why, that says more from the poetic point of view than all your exposition of the need for change.

Fry: And he saw that later?

Field: He saw that later, and was very sorry, so when I brought out the posthumous collected poems, I explained all this, and said that in the end, toward the end of his life, the version that I had brought out was the one that he approved most, and it wasn't the last one that was published, but it was the one that he approved and I thought that ought to go in. I hope I did right.

Jim [Caldwell] said, "You'll never have a harder task in your life to do, never. To interpret another man's ideas and thoughts is truly [inaudible]." I worked over it and worked over it, corrected it, and once in awhile he gave me some ideas.

Fry: Who, you mean Jim?

Field: Yes. Jim loved him very very much. I think he feels even more the guiding influences of his life. So you see, it's not only I who recognized what he was. You would have loved him. He would have loved you.

He couldn't get over the fact--He'd always been with stupid women, excuse me--that's not fair, I mean women that weren't interested in ideas, until he met me, and through me the members of the Women's Party, composed, I suppose, of the best minds that were in the world of political activity, and he couldn't get over the delight in being with them. So you can imagine the delight he'd have being with you.

Fry: It was quite a change, I guess, from his usual run of social contacts with women?

Field: He was a lonely man, darling, deep down.

Fry: Well, we'll have to go on to him next time. Can you just--

Field: I don't know what I'll do when I come to him, because I mustn't spill over.

Reviving the memories is hard, I mean emotionally hard, because they were so deep and so precious. I'll take this copy of Dante's Inferno. Listen to what he wrote: "My darling, when the above was written--" he had first given it to me on December 14, 1912--"When the above was written we were lovers, and as I write this we are lovers. We have passed through hell and purgatory, but always hand in hand as lovers, and now we are in paradise and you are my wife as well as my lover, and we are lovers still always, hand in hand. Day after tomorrow, September 1, will be your birthday. I desperately beg and plead with fate that all the gods prolong my life with you, which is all I ask. Your lover and your husband."

Field: Well, I've had to get out these things, and I had religiously put them away, because they raised too much emotion. But this is even sweeter. This was given me, of course, also, the same day, and the reason I had left them, among other things, out here is that I've got to have Ed Grabhorn tell me to what binder I can go to have--[gesturing] this came off, I read Dante so hard.

"Sara, darling, that ink is very pale." He had written this, you see, on December 14, with green ink. "It ought not to do that. (It means: it's fading) It's only 24 years from then till now? Twenty-four years, and I want a million with you and then a million more. That's why death is so merciful. You don't know that the end has come. You just go to sleep. But I won't talk of death. I have written something in the Inferno volume. Here I want to write of paradise. This hilltop of ours, the peace, the beauty, the birds at their morning bath by your window, the giant oaks and rivers of flowers, figs, oranges, lemons, grapes, muscatine [muscadine]"--isn't that the name, muscatine?--"it is paradise. And you have made it with some trifling--" this here is a lovely thing, always his sense of humor--"And you have made it, with some trifling assistance from God. Dear old God, how we hate to give Him up." I think in the end he didn't. "And when the great opalescent valley below, one of the greatest fruit valleys in the world--" and so forth. "But all this is nothing compared to our children, our grandchildren, our dear friends, the great people who come and go from this house, who bathe us in love. We are greatly blessed, my darling. Poor old Dante--if he had but only known us and The Cats. And day after tomorrow, your birthday. You were born for me, wasn't it nice? I am so glad."

You can see why I could never marry again. I was in my sixties when he died, and there were two different elderly men who thought they could at least tell a good companion--I couldn't face it. I'd had all that a woman could ask in this life in that relationship. How could I have ever--I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have made a man a good wife. I'd always have been thinking about him.

Fry: Yes. Well, it's going to be so important to try to reconstruct this; I hope it isn't too painful.

Field: It won't be painful, Chita. In a way--But I won't attempt it until I have mastered it. But, you see, the thing is that even after sixteen years of loneliness, it's just what Emily Dickinson says: "They say that time assuages. Time never did assuage, and actual suffering strengthens as sinews do in age. Time is a test of trouble, but not a remedy. If so it prove,

Field: it prove, too, there was no malady."

And you see, the long loneliness is the test, because I am very lonely at times--most of the time. And yet I'd rather be, as I've said, lonely alone than lonely with someone.

Well, I'm talking from my heart now, a little bit, and I should not do it.

Fry: Maybe if we creep up on Erskine, and began to talk about his work and his influence on people around him and more objective things, it would be easier.

Field: I want to form it into a kind of, you might say, character sketch that won't be too involved. I can't help some involvement, because it was unusual for a man of his prominence and family relationships to leave all, and with all Portland crying out against him, and come and want nothing but me. You don't get that very often, and I can't wholly talk about it in a dispassionate way, without leaving out something of that courage of his nature. When he was convinced a thing was right--

Oh, I'll let you read a letter he wrote his wife--it was so touching--in which he tries to show her he still loves her, but there was a difference between love and being in love, and the reason you were in love at his late age was because you had found a mutuality in everything. She had been a Baltimore-Washington belle, and used to luxury and service, and she was always ashamed when he invited some of his powerful labor men friends up to the house and they had dirty fingernails. Well, he said, "Did you look at their souls? At their ideas?" Of course he didn't mean that he liked dirty fingernails, because he was an esthete along with everything else.

You'll have to help me. I do want to get something of the roundness of his character. Perhaps it's enough that it's in his writings. I don't know whether it is or not. I don't know.

Fry: Well, just an idea, too, of how he--a picture of how he fitted into Portland at the time he met you.

Field: Yes.

Fry: Just as you've mentioned today. We'll fill in the crevices of what you've mentioned today on his work towards socialism with various groups there.

Field: Well, I don't know that he was working--I don't know if there was any particular socialist organization. I could never find one

Field: there. But what he worked with were--I mean, what he did do was speak very often at the Labor Temple to the labor groups, because he felt they were working toward this, you see, for better conditions for labor, or at least a move toward that thing that socialism would do for all of them. And he would defend anybody. Ernest Besig, the head of the Civil Liberties (ACLU), and I were talking about it about a year ago; he said, "Why, he had a little civil liberties union of his own long before we organized." He was defending everybody, all these soap-box speakers on the street, you know, that were arrested, and he defended Margaret Sanger when she came out, and was arrested for, imagine, for disseminating "obscene literature." Dear Margaret. Not very long ago, a year ago, Arthur Caylor said in a column in the San Francisco News--he's a columnist--that he had been on a ship coming from Japan, and there was a very old lady. It's hard to realize that Margaret Sanger's a very old lady, she was so young and vital once--so was I. And they got to talking, and she said, "Do you know, the most memorable person that I ever met in all my experiences anywhere was a man named Charles Erskine Scott Wood in Portland." She said he seemed to understand everything, and she said, "He had to defend me before a Catholic judge."

Fry: I was going to ask you if the Catholic influence was very strong in Portland?

Field: No, not very.

He had refused--I think I told you the story of his refusal to promise to bring his children up Catholic. His wife was Catholic, he had refused it. Cardinal Gibbon, too, was a relative of his first wife; [he] called him in and said, "Look here, Lieutenant Wood"--that's what he was--"you're a man of honor, and nobody rises to be the aide to a man like General Howard--he's a trusted man, and you're a man of honor, and I hear you don't want to sign the paper that you won't have your children--" And he said, "Now you just give me your word of honor that you will."

And Erskine looked at him astonished. He said, "Cardinal, what's the difference between my word of honor"--he was so young then, you know, and in love, and he said, "What's the difference between my word of honor and my signature? No, I will not give you my word." And the cardinal got red in the face and angry. He had said, "You do that, and then I will come and marry you myself"--it was a great honor; they were just going to have an ordinary priest, I suppose. And when Erskine said that, he said, "Well, there'll be a curse on your marriage. Your wife"--I think this is so funny, because

Field: it was the other way around--"your wife will not be faithful to you." Well, she was the most faithful human in the world.

But anyway, they had to be married by an Episcopal minister, and so none of his children were ever exposed to Catholicism. Not one of them ever went to any church. Except toward the very end I think Lisa [Wood Smith] and Kirk [G. Kirkham Smith] were inclined toward the Unitarian Church a little. But they were all fine children. And she [Mrs. Wood] was of course not allowed to take the sacrament after that, and I must say for her that she had a pride. The Church hadn't done that to her. When the priest began to call on her when she was very ill--they never let you go, you know, they want to get you at the last. And though years, of course, had gone by, and her children [were] grown and married, and she was very ill. The priest kept coming and coming, and she'd send down word she didn't want to see him. I thought that was pretty nice, because many at the last feel like they'd like to have the holy sacrament or they'd like to confess. She'd grown away from it. I think it was just the habit of not going; she hadn't gone much anyway.

As Vincent [Marengo, of The Cats] put it once to me--he didn't like the Catholic Church at all and felt that they took advantage of everybody, and yet he had this elaborate funeral, Catholic funeral, for his mother, and I said, "Vincent, you always expressed your opinion as not being very happy about the Catholic Church." And he opened his eyes wide and he looked at me, and he said, "But we were born Catholic." As if you might say, "--might not like American ways and so on, but you're born an American and unless you change your citizenship--" Vincent never changed his citizenship, although he didn't like it. I suppose that's why I wonder so much about Mrs. Wood. She never would have the priest come near her. She'd begun to go to the Episcopal Church, I think.

Fry: Was she just completely uninterested in social and economic and political matters?

Field: Absolutely. She was so class conscious. You see, all her relatives had been high in the military ranks or other ranks, and when she was a young girl, slavery I guess had been abolished but of course you can't abolish all the effects of it, and there were still subservient Negroes and she had a little phaeton and a little Negro boy who'd sit on the back seat, you know, because she loved to drive, and he'd jump out to do everything for her. She always had somebody to pick up the handkerchiefs she dropped. I mean, she was really very class conscious, and very disturbed about Erskine's interest in, as she put it, "the lower classes."

Fry: She was sort of a Southern lady, then?

Field: Absolutely, with all that prejudice. She had a certain kind of humor, I wouldn't call it wit, that was--I hear she hated me from the very first, long before Erskine and I were any more than just--you might say, had met and were interested in each other's poetry, I more in his (I hadn't done much, because I always destroyed everything I did; I wasn't satisfied with it).

I won't forget one night, my then husband and I went to dinner there at his very beautiful home in Portland, and he asked me to come into his own, you might say, den, except that it wasn't like a usual den. It had no antlers' ears and things with horns or things like that. It was full of very rare books and beautiful objects. He was crazy about classical civilization and had some beautiful--what do they call these post mortem objects that were buried in the grave?

Fry: Artifacts?

Field: Artifacts that had been resurrected, usually, and they had that lovely opalescent tint. Well, he had things like that in there, and he asked me to come in, he wanted to show me a book, and I said, "All right," and we went in there, and Mrs. Wood came in. She turned white; it was as if she really had some kind of woman's intuition, because we certainly weren't doing anything. We were looking in a book. Nor thinking of anything more. She left the room, and by George, she fainted, and she was carried upstairs and put on the bed, and some of the women, I included, went up to see what we could do to help, and she said, "Don't let that woman in, put her out," when I came in.

Fry: That was really quite early then.

Field: Very early. We hadn't been there long--and if we hadn't been introduced by Darrow I would probably never have--I won't say, never met him.

[end of interview]

XIII GROWING DISHARMONY

[March 22, 1961]

Clarence Darrow

- Fry: Do you know whether Clarence Darrow had any interest in the things that were going on in Cleveland and in Tom Johnson's attempts there to enlighten the general public?
- Field: He had the deepest of interest. He knew Tom Johnson very well, and as he had frequent causes to come to Cleveland, he did. I remember that since he knew my sister Mary in Chicago, who was then doing settlement work, of which I would like to speak later, he came to see me. But I didn't get very well acquainted with him until a certain summer in a year I can't remember [when] I went to visit my sister at [inaudible], which was just outside of Chicago, and there I saw a great deal of him. He was also there for a vacation, and I saw a great deal of him, and we had many talks on matters that appertained to social welfare.
- Fry: Was your sister living in [inaudible] or was this a resort?
- Field: It was the resort--there was a hotel there where you could stay rather reasonably in those days, and he was there and she was there and I was there. It gave me the opportunity to really know him better, and I think we became at that time firm friends. Certainly he knew what the trend of my own thinking was. He was certainly astonished also that a minister's wife had in any way become [interested in] what would then have been called "left-wing activities," though today everything that Tom Johnson advocated [has been done], except perhaps single tax, which has been added to in many other ways and is approaching, probably, some kind of success in a more complicated fashion than Henry George presented.

Field: But he [Darrow] was indeed a man who was always in the forefront of the liberal movement. I think he has been more known as the advocate of the downtrodden, as the phrase goes, and the poor, and the attorney for labor, but he also was very much interested in general social progress. Getting acquainted with him there was a very key factor in my life, because it led to the circumstances that were to mold my future after we had to leave Cleveland.

Fry: Well, this was a couple of years before you had to leave Cleveland, wasn't it?

Field: Yes. Maybe a little more, but I can't remember the date. All I remember is there had been a firm friendship established. He came to Cleveland on a very important law case, and came to see me just about the time we knew we had to go to Cleveland. Indeed, I think we had begun the--I mean leave Cleveland, excuse me--we had begun to do the miserable business of packing up. He found me in tears or near tears at the prospect of leaving and of going to Portland. I had a very ignorant conception of the West (though I think I didn't have an ignorant conception of Portland), and thought that it was probably a country utterly desolate of ideas and progress. Why I should get that idea, that progress had stopped at the borders of Cleveland, I don't know, except for my deepest admiration of Tom Johnson, who had put his own private meanings into all the endeavors that he undertook, which were then fought to the very last by the banks and the big interests. I couldn't imagine that any such experiments were going on anywhere else. At least I didn't know about them. I think probably Lincoln Steffens' famous article on the best-governed city in America (which was Cleveland) as against the worst-governed city (which was Cincinnati, and was Tammany-ruled, so to speak--at least boss-ruled), may have influenced my thinking.

But anyway, I said to Mr. Darrow, "Here I have lived in this wonderful atmosphere of progress and brave endeavor, and I've got to go out to that desolate country." And he said, "Well, Portland is pretty benighted. It's a city that has failed to catch the flame that you find farther south, in San Francisco and [in] other cities even north--even Seattle is more advanced than Portland."

Fry: How did he mean, advanced? Was he talking about good government?

Field: I think he was talking about the attitude of mind more, the fact that there was a more general culture, that there was more sense of progress to be made in these other cities, whereas Portland seemed hopelessly bogged down in convention and rule by first families, with all their narrow limitations and conformities.

Field: He said to me, "There is one man out there that I think you will like, and you'll surely meet him." He told me his name, which was Wood, but at that time I was so sad at the idea of leaving Cleveland and so immersed in all that I had to do, both practically and otherwise, to clear things up, that I don't remember that I carried his name on my mind, and then it seemed to me probably that one man wasn't enough to save a city. [Laughing] Like Sodom and Gomorrah, you know, when it got down to ten men, God couldn't stand it any longer and had to destroy it, and I felt that probably Portland was ready for destruction in spite of one good man. Anyway, I have no recollection of going to Portland with his name in my mind.

Afterward, in afterthought, I remembered the things that Darrow told me about him. He said, "He's a very liberal thinker. He is a philosophical anarchist. He is a man of many gifts--he paints, he writes poetry, he's the leading admiralty lawyer on the Pacific Coast, and how he finds time for all that he does I don't know." This all came back to me after I had met Charles Erskine Scott Wood.

Fry: Did your husband meet Darrow in Cleveland?

Field: I think he wasn't home at the time that Darrow came out to call on us, and I don't remember that he was at [inaudible] at the time I was there, and all this puzzles me. I will try to find out from my sister if she remembers when I visited her, because I don't remember having children there. I did have, indeed, a very good Norwegian or Swedish maid, and may have felt the children were safe with her and that I needed to get away for a little while, for I was never very strong and I worked very hard, but my memory is that Albert Ehrgott did not meet Darrow until after we went to Portland [1910].

Fry: So you packed up and left for Portland? How did you go to Portland, by the way?

Field: We went by train, and stopped at Cincinnati, where my then husband's family all lived, some of whom were eminent musicians, of whom I've spoken. His dear mother took me aside and asked me if I could explain this strange son of hers, who had seemed to forsake all the German ways and the love for the things that the Germans cared for. They lived a bohemian life in the best sense of the word, just absorbed in music. I don't know that they were interested in any of the other arts, but they certainly were easy to be with, whereas my husband was tense and I think really inwardly disturbed.

Fry: Sara, could I go back and ask you a question. When you were

- Fry: visiting Mary, and had many long conversations with Darrow, do you remember whether he talked with you about the Bible and his interpretation of the Bible or not?
- Field: He did, indeed, and like so many misunderstood liberals, he was reverent, as was my husband, Charles Erskine Scott Wood. I later found out that he was reverent indeed toward the life of Jesus and the teachings of Jesus, but he had nothing but scorn for the churches which taught, as he felt, only dogma and orthodoxy and went out to practice anything but the ideas that were involved in Christ's teachings.
- Fry: That's interesting. This was quite a while before the Scopes trial.
- Field: I think there was no man that knew the Bible better. I cannot remember in his biography whether his parents were religious and [whether] he had been brought up, as I had been, on the Bible, and knew it very thoroughly, but he certainly knew the New Testament.
- Fry: Even at that time?
- Field: Oh yes, indeed.
- Fry: Was he a single-taxer, too; did you talk about that?
- Field: I think he was more a socialist, an out-and-out socialist, than just a single-taxer. Henry George's idea that single tax would solve all the problems of poverty and wealth didn't satisfy him, as I remember it. He felt that you had to go further, that all the machinery of society, I mean of industry, ought to be under government ought to be under government ownership, not under dictatorship. Indeed at that time there was no talk of dictatorship anywhere. I suppose that was because Marxism in its extremest form was very young in this country, or certainly was not known to me until long after. Then I read an abridged copy of Das Kapital, which didn't seem to me at all in conflict with the ideas that I held.
- Fry: And this was, too, before the Russian Revolution?
- Field: Oh, yes.

To Portland

- Fry: Would you like to go on now and take us to Portland?

Field: After our visit to my then-husband's relatives, which I greatly enjoyed--I had to assure his mother that I couldn't explain to her, psychology or psychiatry (whatever it would include) being unfamiliar to me, what had been the urge for him to go into the ministry. I had to explain to her that I felt he had had a genuine call, as he called it, to this profession, and that in his own way he was doing very well in it. When I said very well in it, I think I was thinking of the gradual change in his social attitude. He really had become, I think, a Christian Socialist at that time.

So we arrived in Portland finally, after the long journey across the continent by train, which we all thoroughly enjoyed, the children included, and we found that there was a parsonage attached to the church that we were to preside over. It was a very small house and it was in a very ugly and uncomfortable, really, street, because it was so crowded with houses. There was no sense of space. I think [need for a] sense of space is inborn in me. I just had to have it wherever I went and had had it up till the time that we left Cleveland, because we had quite a spacious garden around us and not such a sense of one house so close to the other that you could hear a whisper. But this little [inaudible] Street (as I think I remember it was called) house, was of that kind. It was very close to the other neighbors, and it wasn't long before we decided to do what was I suppose an extremely adventurous thing for persons living on such a small income.

We decided to buy a house, way out in the suburbs of Portland, as it was then; now it is built up solid, showing the growth of that city. But this was way out in the Rose City Park area, and you had to walk two blocks, often, before you saw a house. I can't quite remember, because I didn't have charge of it, how we were planning to finance it, but evidently a satisfactory arrangement was made. These were days when the dollar was of full value and when, I imagine, real estate was in such a condition of depression, really, in Portland (there not being at that time much increase in population) that they were willing to make very liberal terms even to people as poor as we were. For whatever reason we bought a very, for us, spacious house with three bedrooms. I remember the joy of a fine sleeping porch on the back of the house on which we all slept; the children had cots there and we had one, and in good weather the sleeping porch was our preference over any bedroom. I mention that because of the sense of inner freedom that gave me, the being too close to one's neighbors doesn't give one a sense of freedom.

Fry: We ought to mention here that this was about 1910, wasn't it?

Field: Yes, this was in the early spring of 1910 that we went from Cleveland.

Fry: How was the congregation in that church? Was it any more amenable to Christian Socialism than the church you left in Cleveland?

Field: I would say very much less so. I would say also that it was so awfully orthodox that a new idea couldn't get over to them at all. They wanted the old Gospels, as they called it, and I presume had they known that my husband had some light on social problems they might not have called him. I don't think he deliberately withheld them; he was a very honest person, but it just wasn't needed to be said in whatever application was [made]--in fact, it wasn't an application. He had no application.

I remember how he was called there. There were some people who had lived in Cleveland that liked him, and [they] had moved out to Portland and had recommended him for the pastory which had been vacated.

Fry: So he was just sent?

Field: I am astonished as I do this recording, reluctantly [laughs], at how far I must have gone away from the church as well as away from conventional social ideas, because it seems to me it was no time at all before I felt the rebellion against the dishonesty of my life. It was a life of pretense when I went to the church and prayer meetings. I was supposed, of course (even more than in Cleveland), to be a kind of leader of many of the women's organizations, and I was utterly unfitted for it in every way.

Certainly, I know that we hadn't been there long before one day, when I was working out in the garden of the new house (because we decided to get that [a garden] very soon after our going to Portland), a taxi drove up through all the mud--because that street was still unpaved, I presume that's one reason why we got it so cheap, not realizing that later we'd have to help pay for the paving--and out got Clarence Darrow.

I should preface this by saying that I had a letter from him before this, saying that he was coming but not saying when, and he said to me in the letter, "I hope by this time you have met my friend Wood." That is the first time I remember recalling the name that he had spoken in Cleveland. I think it's very hard for me to make it plain how perturbed my mind was at this time. I didn't like being in such discord with

Field:

the professional life of my then husband, [and] I certainly didn't like living as if I did believe in it when I didn't. I think this, combined with the excessive physical energy it took to make all these moves, had utterly driven my conversation with Darrow in Cleveland from my mind. But when he said, "I hope you have met my friend Wood," and "I'm coming out to [Portland]," I thought that it was too bad I hadn't met him but that it wasn't up to me to make overtures. By this time I had found out that he lived in another world. He lived, in the first place, on what's called the East Side, which was the swank side of Portland up in Portland Hill. He was part of the high social life--one of those strange factors that I think Gunther and others have mentioned--with as much difference in [his views from] the opinions of that set as I had with my group. I had heard (I think now as I remember it) in a vague way that he was a liberal man and one I would like to meet, but I had no opportunity to meet him.

Then, as I say, this taxi drove up, and out stepped Clarence Darrow, and he said, "I want you and your husband to come to dinner and meet my friend Wood that I've told you all about."

I said, "Oh, Darrow,"--everybody called him just Darrow--"I haven't got any decent clothes, and I'm all mud, as you can see, from working in the garden." It wasn't very long before we would have to be there, evidently, because he had come late in the afternoon.

He said, "Oh, I'm sure you can arrange it all right, and we're going to dine in a very bohemian place. You can wear any old thing at all." And he gave one of those wry smiles of his and said, "You know," in his drawly way, "You know I have never been a fellow that dressed up very much." So I went in and consulted my husband and we agreed to go.

Meeting with Colonel Wood

I want to be very careful about all this portion of what I record, because every move that was made was so unpredictable and so important.

Fry:

Did you have in your mind on this particular day that you thought that this lawyer, Mr. Wood, might be a good person for your husband to know, that they might enjoy meeting, or anything, or was this primarily--?

Field: I just assumed that he would. I assumed he would because at that time I didn't know how free Colonel Wood was at expressing his unorthodox religious views, which would immediately offend my husband, whose orthodoxy remained intact. But I already was beginning to feel the starvation that the few months in Portland had given me mentally. I was missing the atmosphere of Cleveland. I think even now if you go back to Cleveland--I mean to Portland--unless you get in with the Reed College group where there is some liberal light, you still feel the sense of the past that clings to Portland. It doesn't seem to be a city facing the future in any degree at all. I say that not on my own but on the testimony of some of what were to be my relatives-in-law, who have lived there a long time and a few of whom have also become liberal and feel restless in the atmosphere of Portland.

So I presume I was in a condition to--well, let us say, to be favorable to the meeting of anybody, man or woman--

Fry: You were in a very great vacuum and it had to be filled?

Field: It had to be filled, and there wasn't anyone up to date that had filled it. I was a stranger in a strange land, and the need for discussion of views, [for] the exchange of ideas which becomes very precious to a person whose life doesn't depend on just the practical things had become acute.

Anyhow, I remember so well the whole meeting. We met at the Portland Hotel, because that was the most central place. We went for dinner as Darrow had promised at the most, then, bohemian place in Portland, which was called the Hofbrau, a place destroyed at the time we thought we had to destroy later, all the places with German names, in World War I. Nothing was allowed to exist that carried a German name. They stopped teaching German in schools and high schools. There was never such an exhibition of foolish exercise of dissent from the larger ideas that the war may have entailed, though we always felt that it was a war for profit and gain.

Fry: Did you mean they destroyed the restaurant?

Field: No, it was just destroyed by people not patronizing it.

Fry: So you went to the Hofbrau that night at dinner?

Field: Yes, but before that, as I say, we met at the Portland Hotel. I remember thinking that probably I would meet Colonel Wood's wife, too, and I was surprised to see that he was there with

Field: two quite young women and a young man. The young women proved to be, the one his private secretary and the other the fiancée of the first pediatrician who ever came to Portland, young Dr. Bilderbach as he was then, and he was the young man who was there. It's very hard for me to realize that as he [Dr. Bilderbach] was older than I then, he must be very old now, but he was extremely young looking, and they were there. But standing out was the figure of Colonel Wood.

Fry: Now that's what I want to hear about. What did he look like that night?

Field: He had a beard, as he always had worn one since his early days in the army. (He always said he wore it because he didn't have to shave so often.) He had a most beautiful complexion and the keenest and kindest eagle blue-gray eyes I think I have ever seen. I think it is an extraordinary combination, where keenness is combined with kindness. So often they [keen eyes] grow sharp and hard, but his were not. And he had very curly gray hair. For his years, he was young looking. He was then in his late fifties, fifty-eight or fifty-nine, I think--and he was so handsome that everyone wherever he went turned round to look at him again.

Later on--lest I forget to tell it in proper place--when his life and mine were united, he would be taken in Europe always as a poet or a composer by strangers who would come up and say, "Aren't you so-and-so? Aren't you Tagore?" or "Aren't you--" someone of the various great musicians that were at that time composing, and this distinguished quality sort of threw everybody else into a shadow. Not that he was in any way foolishly aware of it. I don't believe a man who was as prominent and handsome as he could be so naive as not to recognize that it was so, but he had a peculiar lack of vanity. Self-confidence he had in plenty, but not vanity, or self-consciousness.

He was immediately interested, I could see that, in these strangers that he was meeting. I think here I ought to tell you what I learned afterwards about his being there at all. Darrow had gone to his office and said to him, "Wood, I have a friend out here that I want you to know. She's just come out"--please notice, he mentioned me as a single person, so to speak, he didn't include my husband, with whom I think he was not favorably impressed--"and I want you to meet her. She's very lonely, she needs contact with the more liberal elements, if there be such a thing in Portland, and I'd like you to be my guest at dinner tonight."

And my future husband said, "I can't, Darrow, I'm taking

Field: my wife to a dinner at the Portland Hotel."

And he [Darrow] said, "Well, can't you get out of it?"

Colonel Wood said, "Well, I don't know. Perhaps I could ask my brother to take her."

And Darrow, with that same wry and always skeptical look that he had, said, "Why don't you just lie to her? I find that's the easiest way out."

And Colonel Wood said, "Well, I don't. That's not my method." So he did get his brother to take his then-wife to dinner, and therefore he appeared without a wife, and there were no explanations made.

Fry: Hadn't Darrow told him that he wanted him to meet a preacher's wife?

Field: Oh, yes. I'm so glad you mentioned that, because that was very funny. Colonel Wood said, "Who is this person?"

And he said, "Well, her name is Mrs. Ehrgott and she's a minister's wife."

"What?" said Colonel Wood.

And he said, "What have I got to do with a minister's wife? Darrow, you know we wouldn't have anything in common at all."

And Darrow leaned over and said, "Listen, she's one of us."

Fry: [Laughs] One of the underground.

Field: That was always a great consolation to me in later years, to know that he had felt that I was worthy to be in the group, trying to move the world onward a little. So with those words evidently Colonel Wood was convinced that he might find something in common, and he came.

Well, we went over to the Hofbrau, and there I was put on Colonel Wood's right, or left; Darrow I think was on the other side, some such arrangement. Those details I can't remember, except that I sat next to him. And we got to talking about modern literature, and I asked him if he was reading Wells, who was then the most talked-of liberal writer of our time--H.G. Wells, and he had written a book called Ann Veronica, which was on the--a book which dealt with his beliefs in a greater freedom for women, and Colonel Wood said,

Field: "No, I've heard of it. I get very little time for outside reading, and I'm very sorry." And I always remembered his quotation, he said, "Because I remember what Bacon said, that 'much reading maketh a full man,' and I know I should read more but I'm always caught up in some very important case on which I have to read a great deal to get all the background, and the results are that if I do pick up a book it's usually," and he smiled, "a book of poetry."

And I said, Oh yes, that I remembered that Mr. Darrow told me long back in Cleveland that he was a poet.

He said, "Yes, I am, and I wish I had more time to write it, and I certainly turn to poetry for my reading to a large extent, outside of the necessary reading."

Further than that I don't remember that we had any talk on social matters, except that Darrow, who was crazy about Galsworthy, who was also then a leading light in literature, had a new book out of short stories. I wish I could remember its title; I'll look it up and tell you, because it also had a place in all that happened that night. And Darrow said, "If Wood will let us go over to his private office, afterwards, I'll read one of these stories to you." He loved to read aloud, I ought to say, and many a time I've heard him read both prose and poetry very beautifully, and my then-husband spoke up and said, "No, I can't go, I've got a meeting tonight, but my wife can go" (because I think I remember it was a meeting of just men). So we all, except my husband, went over to Mr. Wood's private office, which was then in the old Chamber of Commerce Building which has now been destroyed, I believe, for a more modern building.

We entered a place that I thought would look like any other kind of an office and to my astonishment it was one of the most beautiful rooms I've been in. It had Oriental rugs and a most beautiful desk of old English furniture, and many objets d'art about the room that distinguished it from any room that I might say I'd been in, because I hadn't seen anything like that even in Cleveland. It was a revelation to me of another side of him that I was to learn was very deep, in the most deeply aesthetic sense. He just couldn't stand being surrounded with ugly objects. He was willing in his law offices to have them official and cold as I presume they have to be, and that was for business, but not a place where he went privately to paint and to think and to work on his more personal ventures.

So I sat there listening partly to Darrow and mostly taking in the beauty of the room, and of how he fitted into it--how

Field: Colonel Wood fitted into it. Darrow, as I do remember when my mind came back to what he was reading, read us one of these short stories that dealt with a social problem of an acute nature, and Colonel Wood listened most attentively and approvingly, and then my husband came to call for me and the evening broke up.

Well, I went home with a great turmoil in my heart, realizing that I'd been with a group I belonged with and that my life didn't otherwise fit into.

Fry: You belonged with them spiritually and intellectually but not economically or socially?

Field: Exactly. And the sense of chasm gave me a feeling of more utter loneliness than I can explain.

As we were leaving the private office, he said to me, "Darrow tells me you do some writing and that you've written some poetry."

I said, "Well, since I took a course of criticism under Professor Lounsbury at Yale one year when my husband was out of a job and we lived in New Haven, I doubt very much that I've written anything of importance."

And he said, "You took a course of criticism?"

And I said, "Yes."

"Well," he said, "I need some help on criticism. I have a galley proof here of sonnets, and I wish you'd take them home with you and look them over and tell me if you think they're worth anything, and how perhaps they could be used with less monotony than they now are," or "they now have been used."*

So at least I went home with a tangible evidence of something that I had longed for, because among my many other interests in Cleveland had been my interest in poetry and in the early modern poets, I am glad to say, of my period. They'd now be considered very old-fashioned.

* On further reflection, Sara Bard Field concluded that she received the galley proof of the sonnets from Colonel Wood on a later occasion. (See p.218) --Ed.

Field: I read these sonnets very slowly and carefully. They were called Maia, or A Sonnet Sequence of the Seasons, and I realized that they could make a story, or if they had been intended to make a story it wasn't too plain, and that they also ought to be rearranged and broken up with perhaps certain very brief and lyrical but not what we call pure poetry interludes, and I suggested some such interludes. I felt very bold doing this, but I think that perhaps while I might have been too frightened to criticize anything of this man that I recognized as great from the minute I met him, great in being, as it were, there was something large and ample and spacious and all-inclusive about him, and I would hesitate to criticize anything other than a field in which I had been doing some work, and even then I was pretty timorous about it. But I remember--no, I'm getting ahead of my story. There were other things that happened before this.

A Chasm Grows

Field: Um-hm. The other thing that happened, I don't see how I could have forgotten it, because it was one of the most yeasty, fermenting periods of my life. Having met him, I realized for the first time what I'd never faced, that I could [not] go on with the life I had lived as a minister's wife. I really came to that conclusion from the three months of a sense of starvation and of double living that it made and seeming to be a good minister's wife and really not inwardly being. From the revelation of that evening of contact, I want this registered, because I was by no means--unless one could say, looking back afterwards--[in] love at first sight. I wasn't aware that it was. I just knew that I'd met a great man and some youngpeople who were also interested in his ideas, and that I had loved the evening beyond words and had gotten nourishment from it, and now faced the old life again in its emptiness. Under these conditions I wasn't going to be able to give my children the kind of education I wanted them to have, nor the contacts I wanted them to have, and what was to be done about it?

I think I also realized at this time (because quite a long time went by before I saw Colonel Wood again), I realized quite apart from him that I was not in love with my then-husband, and to me it was a sort of wickedness to go on living under conditions like that. The routine continued, however, until oddly enough, I received a second letter from Darrow, I imagine it must have been three months later, saying, "Oh, by this time I'm sure you and Wood have become good friends and you're not as sad as you were when I found you before," and I realized that perhaps it had been up to me to do something

Field: about seeing him again, but I was baffled. I didn't know whether he had a wife or not; he hadn't appeared with one and I thought perhaps he was a widower. In fact, all circumstances prevented my ever thinking of him in relation to another woman for some time. I was really, [at] this time, in debt to him, because while Darrow had said he wanted to give the dinner, Colonel Wood hadn't allowed it at all. He said, "Look here, Darrow, you're a guest in this city and I don't let guests take [care] of things." So he had really taken my husband and me to dinner and we had done nothing about it.

So very hesitantly I remember calling him up, and saying, "Would you consider coming out to a minister's house for dinner? I realize it's rather out of your line, but I'm very sure that I agree with many of the ideas Mr. Darrow tells me you believe and I think also I love poetry and we might [find] some common ground. As for my husband, he is interested in social reform but always in an orthodox way; he wants all the orthodoxy of old Christianity kept." I explained this fully, so he would know what he would meet, and not come if he didn't want to, and I also added, "Will you bring anyone else that you desire with you?" I thought that left it open for him to say, "I'll bring my wife," if he had one. Well, he said, yes, he would certainly like to come out very much, and we made an appointment for a dinner. It seems to me, as I remember that dinner, it was the worst one that could have been produced for what I learned later was an epicure. I had a most incompetent maid as far as cooking went, and I had a fixed desire always to put my children to bed myself, to see that they were tucked in properly, sleeping as they did on the sleeping porch, and so I couldn't be in the kitchen to supervise the dinner, with the result that the roast of beef, which was an extravagance beyond words in our household, was overcooked, and as for the rest of the dinner I remember it seemed to me a hopeless failure.

Well, when I sat down to dinner finally I said to him that I was something of a cook myself but I hadn't been able to take care of dinner because I always gave that hour to the children and I didn't want to change it, and he said, "Well, I ought to tell you this. This roast beef is delicious, because, I either like it very rare or with a charcoal taste to it." He said, as if it had been over a brazier. Well, it certainly had a charcoal taste. It was done to a crisp, as I remember. So that part of the dinner was a failure.

Then, in the evening, as we sat by the fire, my husband and he fell into what I had dreaded, a discussion of orthodoxy, and Colonel Wood said, "You know, Mr. Ehr Gott, I cannot understand

Field: why it is so necessary to consider Christ as born in a magical and supernatural way, because then it makes him very different from us, whereas I feel that he was a great teacher and a marvelous human being, and that we could all hope someday, if we try hard enough, to live as he lived, and yet if he was born in a supernatural way and we are not then we can't, and he's set apart." Well, this immediately aroused my husband's indignation, and a great argument went on which wasn't, I'm afraid, too pleasant on my husband's side because he didn't like any controversial matters raised about religion.

I don't remember that evening as anything but a matter of charred roast beef and a violent discussion of orthodoxy.

Well, that was that.

Darrow came out again so soon, because the state of Oregon was considering becoming a dry state, and the liquor interests had hired Darrow at an enormous fee, I suppose, to come out and lecture on the subject. My husband refused to go, because of course he believed in the dry state, and I, who knew that the experiments--already I knew this--in the Scandinavian countries had made them realize that there would always be an underground or underhand traffic in liquor unless it was supervised by the state, had taken the middle way and found it worked very well indeed. There was less drunkenness than in a very open state of affairs and yet not rebellion, because it was--the amount of liquor was limited that one could buy. You had to have a ticket and have it punched, this was in Scandinavia, and I had read of this experiment because of my interest generally in Scandinavian progress, because they really had achieved partial socialism even then and still have.

So I went to this lecture, because I wanted to see what Darrow would propose. And surely enough he brought all this Scandinavian experiment up as a very good example of how a great country and a very earnest people had solved their liquor question. Colonel Wood was of course there too, and he saw me there and he came over and said, "Your husband isn't here." And I said, "No, he believed in a dry state." And my husband [Colonel Wood] said, "It won't work. There'll be all kinds of speakeasies and--"

Fry: You mean Colonel Wood?

Field: Yes, and bad liquor on the market, and I think Clarence Darrow

Field: is absolutely right in the things that he had advocated, and I'm very glad to see that you're here, because it evidently shows that you are interested." I said, "Yes, I've read the reports on the Scandinavian experiment," and he looked surprised at that, and he said, "Well, I've never met a woman before in this town that knew anything about that," and that was, as I remember it, the third or fourth--no, the third meeting that we had.

I'm trying very hard to remember now what I told you about--an erroneous date, at least, as to this--

Fry: When he gave you the sonnets?

Field: Yes.

Fry: When all this was happening were you conscious of falling in love with him?

Field: Not at all. I haven't an idea but what I subconsciously--if you can do that, fall in love subconsciously--may have been, for I've learned a great deal more about psychological things than I knew then, but I certainly wasn't consciously falling in love with him. That I had a great attraction for him was not strange, because he had a great attraction for people. Even people who hated his views sought him and loved him--some loved him, at least, in spite of his views, others were uncertain of what their feelings were about him. But that he was a unique figure in Portland I already realized and felt sorry for him, because I thought he, too, must be kind of mentally lonely, no matter how much social prestige and how much admiration he had. I knew that couldn't feed one in the depths of the need that isn't met by such things. So I think that I was always glad to find out that we had these common meeting grounds, and I remember also that at this time I was reading at home [John W.] Cross's life of George Eliot. I had had a passion for George Eliot for a long time, due to my mother, I think, who also did, and had introduced her to me and the rest of the family that cared anything about good literature early in my girlhood, keeping carefully from me any books she thought might be disturbing to my--you might say--orthodox views of marriage or anything of that sort.

But in the life by Cross, I was impressed with the fact that while everybody in England, really, approved her illegal--or unlegalized, let's say--relationship with Lewes, they all condemned her later legalized marriage to Cross himself. This seemed to me a curious and interesting episode in English life, which I knew to be very conventional, and I spoke to Albert

- Field: Ehrgott at the table about this book, which he was not reading, and I defended this relationship. I also later defended the relationship between Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft, which you remember was also nonlegalized, until some years later. This made my husband extremely angry, and he said that I was just becoming a heathen and that I wasn't the kind of woman that he thought he'd married. I'm afraid I told him that he was not the kind of man I thought I'd married, and this was very true, for I had been so young.
- Fry: Did this take place after you had already acknowledged to yourself that somehow you had to change over into the life where you belonged?
- Field: Oh, very definitely. This was always happening in Cleveland. I was [inaudible] my life with books, in the course of which I wasn't particularly searching--doing any research work on free love or unlegalized marriage, but I was open to conviction that where love existed, there was a marriage already made and that any words spoken over it might be a good thing to make living easier but they weren't necessary to the relationship itself. That I was realizing very plainly.
- Fry: This was in Portland, or was it in Cleveland, where you read these books?
- Field: In Portland. I think in Portland I had very little time to read many of the literary books that I wanted to read, and I think among them the life of Shelley and the life of George Eliot were two, and in them both I found the same thing. I didn't read them for that purpose. I read them because I liked George Eliot as a prose writer and I adored Shelley as a poet, and remained in adoration so long that I have one of the largest, probably, individual libraries on Shelley to this day. Unless a person is a Shelley scholar--he would probably have a great many more than I, but I know that I have shelves and shelves of books that deal just with Shelley.

However, this very violent disturbance--you can see, it was an extension as I had grown older of that disturbance that I have told about that happened in Rangoon, when those beautiful people weren't allowed to take communion simply because they hadn't been dipped under water. In other words, I was without knowing it a potential radical, and my husband was [not], except in the one field of social change, of seeing the necessity of government ownership in order to solve the question of extreme poverty which he had seen terribly emphasized in the 1903 depression, which was very terrible. I think I've told how I heard Debs at that time. Well, he heard Debs too, and that

Field: change had been made in his life, but no other changes. He had really grown more and more fixed in his religious orthodoxy, whereas everything in me was breaking up into the realities of the truths that I believe and not what had been taught me by parents and teachers.

I was doing what I understand they do at Reed College the first year the student is there. They undo, if they can, all that they've been taught. It's very hard on some students there. Some commit suicide; they haven't any ground to stand on. But they wish to start with a fresh mind there so as to let the student find out what he or she--at what is considered a riper age than when these things were taught--what his individual thinking is. I saw it work very well on my grandson years later. I was really going through that process myself. It was a breaking up of old ideas and an acceptance of new ones, and not without much thought. It wasn't impulsive; it was because I had had, you might say, first-hand definite experience with seeing the wrongs that were done to society through some of the older conceptions. I hadn't gotten it out of books altogether, though I began to read the books that explained it more technically and more scientifically than, of course, I could have done it. But certainly Albert Ehrgott and I were continents and worlds apart, and it was this conversation that made me know that I couldn't carry on.

With it came the knowledge that I in some way must support myself; even though I went on under that roof, I was prepared to be an independent person.

Fry: This was a rather conscious decision on your part, then?

Field: It was. And you may say, "How about the children?" I haven't said very much about them, but I really think no mother ever loved her children any more than I did. But even mother love can't keep a growing mind from growing, and I realized that they were being brought up in a condition of strain, where things were becoming too tense in our household, because of the differences, and that somehow I would have to release them from this eventually. I was too naive at that time to realize how much courts and decisions would be in favor of a man of orthodoxy and against a woman of my views, but I did think that I would always have the children with me in some way, and their father would be able to see them. Of course, I'm doing what has always made me dread doing these tape recordings; I'm condensing what took a long time to grow from a tiny beginning to the definite statement that I have just made.

Fry: And with so many things from the outside coming in from this angle

Fry: and that angle to gradually shape you toward this decision.

Field: But I was still--I'm still unable to say that I knew I was in love with Colonel Wood. Lots of people think that it was all a matter of his influence, which always makes me a little angry. In the first place, people who didn't know about my past said, "Oh, of course you naturally took on the color of all his views." Why, these views formed in Cleveland, and quite by myself, and I'd say by myself as I met the great minds of that really wonderfully progressive city. So I went to Portland equipped to understand Colonel Wood's views, and perhaps by a minor gift of my own to understand the other side of his life--the literary side--and his longing to get away from the law and have peace and do nothing but write.

Fry: Well, I think that you have made it plain how all of the circumstance built you up into a readiness to meet someone like Wood, so that he fulfilled all of these different things that you were hunting for and searching for at that time.

Field: Yes, I think so too. They were sort of being, you might say, caught up and held together in the meeting of him and in finding out what he was and what he believed. And also having not just the--or rather, never coldly, because it wasn't so with Tom Johnson, because he cared too much about human beings--but not having just the passion for social change but also a love of the great beauty that art and literature had. That I hadn't found.

Fry: There were so many points of communication, and you had had none before, and he probably hadn't had very much either.

Field: He hadn't had any. He told me later that because he was asked to speak at all the big dinners and to do the honors when a very distinguished guest came to Portland, that everybody thought his life was just rich and full, and he said that there had been a great emptiness in him, that that was all surface matter. He spoke well--oratory was one of his many gifts--but it was by no means an ultimate satisfaction to him to be told what a witty speech he made or even what a good speech he made if it was on a sober subject. That isn't fulfilling, I can realize it.

Fry: I'm getting cold.

Field: Oh, say, I asked to take you to lunch and we won't have time to do it if I have to meet Mr. Hamilton at one-thirty.

Fry: What time is it?

Field: My watch is fast, but it's nearly one o'clock. Is there any
 place--let's find out first what time it is.

[end of interview]

XIV REVELATION

[March 28, 1961]

The Children's Welfare

Fry: Sara, could you tell us a little more about Darrow's return and visit to Portland?

Field: Yes, I could. It doesn't add a great deal of important data, but I want to go back for a minute to that first time that Colonel Wood came out to our house, of which I've already spoken, and how one of the things that touched me deeply was that, though he was a man of enormous responsibilities and interests and was at this time trying one of the most important cases, I think, of his life, he had remembered that I had two children whom he hadn't seen, and he stopped at the best candy store to bring them a large box of candy. I found out in later years that that was one of the most amazing expressions of an ability in him, to think in the large human mass and their future and also to think of the individual, in smaller or greater ways.

So by the time that Darrow did return to Portland on a second engagement by the liquor interests, I was able to tell him that I had indeed grown very interested in Colonel Wood and in the group that he had brought into my life, but on this return, so far as my memory goes, there was no meeting between Erskine and Darrow and me, though I may be mistaken about that. All I remember is that in his letter saying he was returning, he asked me if I could meet him for a late breakfast at the Portland Hotel, because he was going to leave that night right after the lecture for another engagement. So I did meet him at the Portland Hotel, and he questioned me about the growth of friendship with Erskine, as I now prefer to speak of him.

He never liked, incidentally, the "Colonel," and tried to

Field:

get rid of it. It was not a military honor, he hadn't stayed in the army long enough to arrive at that. It was what they call a militia title. He had been made by the governor of the state the head of a militia organization and it arbitrarily included the title of colonel, and that stuck to him in a way that we both disliked, and in later life almost got rid of.

Well, at this breakfast, Darrow questioned me about the growing friendship; it was in a mostly friendly way because of my isolation, which he knew better than anyone else, from the groups that I had been associated with in Cleveland. He felt that while even through Erskine there would never be large [liberal] groups or large interests in liberal ideas in Portland, which I found to be most benighted, that at least I might find a small inner group through Erskine. I don't think at that time or any time--and this must be made very clear, for later Albert Ehrigott bitterly accused Darrow of plotting to upset our marriage and to further my feeling for Erskine--he had no such intention. His one thought was that he himself would suffocate in that atmosphere of Portland and that, knowing as I say my past, I would never be able to remain happy there in the narrow confines of a minister's wife existence. He had discovered how unfitted I was for that long before I came out from Cleveland. So I wish to exempt him from any what you might call ulterior designs, not that I would have considered even that ulterior, but many would.

After Darrow left--and, as I say, I don't remember whether I met Erskine again at the meeting or not--but after he left I had a telephone call from Erskine asking my then-husband and me to come to dinner at his house--and I was glad to go for more than one reason, because always there was this doubt in my mind, Is he a widower? No one seems to speak of him as either married or widowed. And also I was glad to go because I heard he had the most beautiful house in Portland, not because of any elaborate arrangement in the house but because everything in it was lovely.

So we went to that dinner, and I decided then and there that he was a widower, because there was no evidence of a wife and his youngest daughter was at the head of the table. This was Lisa, his most lovely child and more like him than any other, and soon to be married, but still single.

The evening passed very happily. She [Lisa] had to go out after dinner, and there were other guests left with Albert Ehrigott, so Erskine invited me to come into his den in the house there, to see his special books and his special objets d'art. He had some beautiful figures--the Tanagra figures in terracotta from

Field:

Boecia in ancient Greece, and some mortuary glass which had become opalescent from being buried in the ground, with the chemical changes taking place. He had all these in a special glass cabinet, but also he had a rare collection of books.

He had just been reading an author of a book on what I hate to say, because it's so misunderstood, on free love, but in the most philosophical sense, analyzing the fact that love had to be free, because it couldn't be possible to promise that it would be a stablized thing, and that to promise to love to the end of your life was saying something that was beyond anybody's control. But it was a scholarly book and not at all an advocate of a sort of merry-go-round of partners, but it did feel that more homes were hurt by people staying together from a sense of duty when love had ceased than if they had separated and lived their separate lives and shared the children, each to his or her ability. This woman [the author] was the daughter of a banker in New York and had become a liberal figure of note because of her reaction against many of the social conventions which she felt were hampering the development of man. She really preceded in many thoughts Margaret Mead. I'm very sorry I cannot remember her name. But Margaret Mead refers to her in some of her books where she speaks of the great freedom in relationships in Tahiti and of how happy and beautiful the children over there are, and how their development seems never to have to include so many mentally disturbed children, for even then that problem was serious.

I realized as he read me a chapter from this book that I was doing the very thing that this author felt was inimical to children, trying to force myself into a belief that for their sake the home must be kept intact, even without its chief ingredient, for children are very sensitive to whether there is love between father and mother, and the growing, almost violent differences between my then husband and myself couldn't help but make a strain in the household, although our arguments were never carried on in the children's presence. But there was a sense already that my son understood the situation, which leads me to speak of the children.

I seem to have been very scant in my references to them, but I was not at all an unloving mother or one who had not the interests of the children deep in her heart. My boy was an extremely sensitive child, but in a healthy way. It made him sort of compassionate. Even as a little boy, for all living creatures; he couldn't bear to kill anything. I don't know whether I have spoken of the story of his making a sling-shot just for fun, just to shoot stones into space, and see how far they would go, but one day as he was doing this the

Field: stone did hit a bird and it fell to the ground, and he came in sobbing and said, "Oh, Mother, come out and put the fly back into the bird."

I said, "Well, listen, darling, you didn't mean to do this, you didn't do it deliberately, you didn't do it as hunters do, just for sport, and I feel that in this great universe where accidents happen to human beings they happen also to the loved creatures that are not human."

But it was a long time before I could comfort him, and it shows the extreme sensitivity of his nature. But he was also a hearty and happy boy, and later as I proceed with this story I can give you other incidents as he grew up of how really fully he adjusted to his age group and took his place among them, up to the very time of his early death. He had an extraordinary, almost secret, attraction for people. I can hardly analyze it myself, because he didn't seem to make any effort, but he really loved people, and I think perhaps when that is sincere and fills the heart as it did his, that it is felt by people who enter into the presence, even of a little child. He was, by this time, about seven or eight years old, and they were always attracted to him.

He was merry and engaging and full of laughter, whereas my daughter, whom I like to think I loved quite as much but did not find having the qualities that young Albert possessed, because perhaps she was jealous of him and she didn't seem to have a capacity at that time to love very much, except perhaps me. But her love was possessive and she didn't want it shared, and she was very gloomy a great deal of the time, and her pictures perhaps a little later show this. I think that she never until later life got Blake's idea of "he that kisses joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise." That, Albert seemed to know by instinct. He let a thing go, he didn't try to clutch it and hold it, and living in that beautiful and unpossessive and out-giving way, he really filled his whole life with happiness, because he lived from moment to moment in that fashion. I saw very early that my little daughter was going to need a great deal more attention than he; I had a feeling that he would develop on his own without very much more guidance than came naturally in the course of contacts with his parents and his teachers.

But I was also very sure that neither of those children were being brought up in an atmosphere in which liberal ideas were early absorbed by them, and this added a great deal to my knowledge as to my own personal upheaval. I wasn't what you might call in a very serene state of mind. I remember I began

Field: to lose weight although I was already a rather thin girl, and that I record simply because it became an important factor in the revelation that was to follow as to my real feeling about Erskine.

At his house that night something crystallized in my mind, and that was, from the reading of that chapter aloud to me by him, that I was not doing the selfish thing in considering that I must be free, but I was also preparing a freer and better life for the children. Of course, I know the psychologist might think that this was wishful thinking, but I still didn't think of my future as tied up with Erskine's and it loomed before me as a terrific problem.

The Women's Suffrage Campaign (1912)

Fry: You were thinking strictly in terms of going it alone?

Field: Going it alone, and I did go it alone, even after I knew the truth of my own feelings. But having never attempted to earn my living in any way nor being trained for any special thing, the question was, How would it be done?

Well, the answer seemed to come all by itself. I had joined the College Equal Suffrage League, for though I wasn't a college graduate I had done enough work in college so it entitled me to belong to it, and in it was one of the loveliest young women I had ever met. She looked like one of these little creatures of the period of chivalry that might be kept up in a tower, looking out of the window and waving for her knight to return. [There was] something, both lovable and remote, about her. Her name was Emma [Thelma] Wold, and as I was later to learn, her mother was a first cousin of Ibsen, and the whole family--father and mother--had come over from Norway when the children (of whom there were five), were (at least most of them) already born. She was very familiar with Norwegian and Swedish literature, the poetry of those countries, and I found in her my first happy, close relationship with a woman. She seemed to feel that my long-time interest in suffrage--for I had had it, though no expression of it, in Ohio where I had seen how helpless women were in any reforms or political matters at all without a vote to back up their power. She proposed to the officers of the College Equal Suffrage League that I become the state organizer for the campaign that was to prove the last campaign for suffrage.

- Field: Suffrage had been an uppermost issue for a long time. The state possessed a great liberal and feminist in Mrs. Duniway, Abigail Scott Duniway, who was the sister of the very reactionary editor of the Oregon morning paper, Mr. Scott, who edited this Oregon paper, what was its name? I should remember it, as distinguished from the evening paper, which was called the Oregon Journal. But it was always on the extremely right side of everything and it constantly opposed everything that Mrs. Duniway advocated.
- Fry: Sara, was the College Equal Suffrage League the main organization in Oregon?

Field: Well, it was young. For the first time youth came into it. There had been the old pioneers for so long, and they had become old, and as Mrs. Duniway says in her generous way in her story of the suffrage movement in Oregon, she was very glad that I as a young woman was taking the burden of this state organization--further organization--off her shoulders. She had organized a great many of the suffrage leagues in the state, but by no means had covered it.

Well, of course, it was a hard decision for me to make, because it meant leaving the children a lot, but I had a perfectly wonderful maid in those halcyon days when help from Europe came over not at all despising domestic service and capable of taking a great deal of burden off women who had something else to do. So I did accept the position. I had an office down, if I remember, in the Selling Building in Portland, though that's unimportant, and from that I went out into the state from time to time, to very remote parts of the state where I often had to travel on cattle trains to which was hitched one coach to carry a few passengers.

Oregon was extremely primitive the minute you got away from the larger cities. The people were backward in their thinking; the men stood almost solidly in those parts against suffrage. But as I say I was young and impassioned, and I came among them as a kind of novelty. I got awfully good editorials as a result of the speeches I made, in all the little local papers, and there was a marked evidence of a growing interest in the cause. But also my health wasn't so good under this, because it was during--the campaign was all during the summer, before the fall vote was to come, and those little hot towns in Oregon had the most atrocious equipment for any stranger coming in, both as a place to sleep without bedbugs eating you half up in the night and also places to eat. There were many many days when I learned to live on bananas and (if I could get it without its being exposed to flies) milk. But

Field: I lost a great deal of weight and went down quite considerably.

When I came back from one of these trips I met Colonel Wood, who was very interested in suffrage himself and had always spoken for it whenever Mrs. Duniway launched a campaign. I met him, or he came to one of the meetings in Portland where I spoke, and I think it was then that he asked me if I would come to his private office and look over the galley proof of the sonnets, of which I'm afraid I've spoken before out of context.

Fry: This was really the time when he asked you to come and look at it?

Field: I think so. I think you should record the fact that I'm trying to recall a sequence of events between which there would often be quite a little time, that happened a half-century back.

Fry: Well, we can just cut out your first reference and put it in the proper place.

Field: All right. I'm not sure even of this place, but I think it was. And he gave me this bundle of galley proofs of sonnets which I described before, good, some of them better than others but just strung along. In the large number that he had they became monotonous, the sonnet form being so strict and demanding. It isn't something that you can read many of, in fact even the great Shakespearean sonnets are, I think, hard to read all at once; you want to pause, largely probably because you want to think about what's packed into every sonnet. [A sonnet] is a kind of trunk into which there's much thought packed very neatly and very technically.

Fry: Yes, I noticed when I was reading the sonnets. I was wondering, Sara, if originally there was no idea of Maia there at all.

Field: No, there wasn't.

Fry: That was like the tying of a thread?

Field: Yes, that was the idea, of making it a sequence of the seasons and of interrupting the flow of the sonnets every now and then with an appropriate little prose interlude, that you might call the poetics of prose.

I illustrated this, as I remember, before I took them back. Erskine was simply delighted with the idea. He saw the truth of the monotony, as it had existed. Indeed, it was because he felt [this monotony] that he'd given the galley proofs to me to see what I could do with them.

Field: Well, I worked on those in my spare hours between my very arduous suffrage labor. We were determined to win that campaign and not go on forever taking women's strength and money and time when academically the question was settled. This thought was to lead me on into the more, as I see it, practical and wiser ways later adopted by the Woman's Party. But at that time I knew nothing of any movement toward a federal amendment and so it looked as if women would have to get suffrage state by state, as they had been doing. I don't know whether I mentioned that California had just won the year before, and sent up to us two very fine workers to help her sister state's women, which I feel was a fine gesture on the part of women as to their sense of unity in this matter.

Fry: Can you think of their names right now?

Field: No, I can't, but it tells in Mrs. Duniway's Life who they were; she speaks of this very fine thing that California did.

I can't say enough for Mrs. Duniway's spacious spirit. Here was a woman who had spent her whole life, in her own way, for she was a pioneer type, trying to win suffrage, and every campaign had failed, and her generous and noble attitude toward those who took it over, as she realized they must--those younger women that took it over, as she realized was needed, as well as using the older ones in what capacity we could. But she couldn't speak any more. She was quite old at this time, and so that's left a very fine memory. When I went to see her I had the feeling of some kind of priestess giving me a blessing. She really did feel that she was doing that, for without any silly vanity I think there was no one that could speak on the history of the suffrage movement better than I for I had learned it very well. I knew how Wyoming had come in as the only free state; it had come in with men and women voting right from the first when it was accepted into the Union, and I knew how slowly and painfully other states had gotten it and had to work. Anyway, she endorsed me with a good deal of fervor and that was something that counted among the older suffragists so they trusted me too, even though I was such a newcomer to Oregon.

Fry: How did she find out about you, in the first place? Were you hunting a job?

Field: No. I told you that the College of Equal Suffrage job just came to me. I'd been a member of the League, you see, and when they realized they needed an organizer, they selected me. I was in my late twenties, and when she heard that she sent me a message asking me if I would come and talk to her so that she

Field: could tell me of some of the problems that she knew existed. And that was how I met her.

I wouldn't like to have any record be without my tribute, not only to her but to all those early women who against such odds, often having the traditional rotten egg thrown at them, had tried to gain this democratic privilege, or right.

Acknowledgment

Then came this revelation, really. I found as I went about my work and in these longer absences sometimes that I was missing my contacts with Erskine very, very much and that I more and more dreaded to go home except for the children's sake.

Fry: You were still at home with the children?

Field: I was still at home except as I had to make these trips that I speak of.

It was with this realization that I went to Colonel Wood's office one day to take some manuscript back to him. I think it might have been the finished Maia, I mean finished as far as my suggestions went, and illustrations of how it could be done, and he looked at me and he said, "You know I've had a good deal of experience with tuberculosis. My oldest son broke down in Harvard with it. It came to my children through their mother's side--it was one reason that my father never wanted me to marry Nannie Moale Smith, because he as a doctor knew that family, who had also produced some wonderful doctors, and knew that there was a tubercular strain." (These were of course the early days, before tuberculosis was so well controlled, and there were many many deaths from it.) He said, "With this experience of trying to find the right climate, the right conditions for my son, I finally sent him to Germany, where he was treated under the greatest physician for tuberculosis at that time, it was in the Black Forest of Germany. His mother went with him, and later Lisa," he said, "went over to be a companion to her mother."

He said, "You know, as I look at you I'm troubled, because I think we must find a reason why you're losing weight so badly." And like a flash the whole thing broke, and he said, very gently and very generously, that I had been of such value in his life already that he hoped I wouldn't think he was exposing me to any hurt of pride if he said that knowing a minister had a very small salary, he would like to take care of

Field: any bills that the experts might have if I would please go and be X-rayed and generally checked up. And I suddenly knew that it was not tuberculosis that was the matter with me; it was this haunting sense that I had had, and yet had not wanted to acknowledge and hadn't acknowledged, that I really loved him.

I walked over to the window of his office and stood looking out and I said, "No, I don't think I have tuberculosis. I'm troubled about my home life and how any departure from it, breaking up the marriage (which is no longer a real marriage), how it would affect the children." And all of a sudden I said, "I'm in love with you." I began to weep.

And he got up from his chair and he said, "Well, I would never have dared to tell you this, I think, under the circumstances of your life, but I know that I have never found a companion like you, and I love you." And there we were, knowing at last that this was a matter so vital that we were willing to make almost any sacrifice on earth to establish a life together.

The impossibility of its being done with any rapidity was tremendous. In fact, the obstacles were impossible to overcome. He had invested in Portland real estate always with the idea of beauty of the land, and not from any sense of whether it really would be profitable, and had gotten heavily in debt and had to finally sell all the pieces he had at a terrific loss and borrow from the bank. So he was in heavy debt. But he knew that in time he could meet that and have enough to live on, because aside from his regular law work, he had been the agent for what was known as the land grant that Lazard Frères, the bankers, had all through Oregon because they were expecting a railroad to be put through central Oregon, and it took years and years to clear all these parcels of land and find out if the legal ownership when they sold was all right, how far back there might have been mortgages. That was what his special and private secretary also did, aside from taking care of his personal mail and other private matters. She also kept these books--she was a good accountant and she kept the books for the land grant, which was kept utterly separate, as I say, from his law-office business.

Well, the land grant was being sold at such an enormous gain to Lazard Frères that his commission would be very large. It would come in in installments but not for many years, and his sense of duty and obligation to his first wife and to his children and to his debtors was such that he couldn't think of throwing up the sponge and in any way making a move that would perhaps hinder these operations.

- Fry: The picture of both your lives changed radically as you were able to acknowledge your feelings for each other, and I guess you had to pick your way pretty carefully.
- Field: We had to do what was the hardest thing for both of us; we had to pretend; we had to not show them [our feelings], since the possibility of our lives being joined for the immediate future and certainly for a long immediate future, was what it was. The only thing that we had was the brief meetings in his private office, which I managed to make because the Selling Building where I had my suffrage office was not far from the old Chamber of Commerce where he had his private office. But they were not plentiful, both because his work was very strenuous and my work was, if not so strenuous, strenuous enough. One of the things that I remember--I'm afraid by this time we were beginning to be talked about in Portland, because we'd meet for lunch every now and then and would be seen together at suffrage meetings.
- He spoke often from the same platform that I did. There's a very interesting account in the Oregonian of this period, of a great meeting in the park where we both spoke, and the reporter said that we were a foil for each other. I don't know exactly what he meant by that except that I do feel we perhaps took up where the other left off, or something of that sort.
- Fry: This must be the one that is referred to in Abigail Scott Duniway's book, where she said you set up an impassioned plea for righting the wrong and presented a very vivid account of the plight of women at that time, and Erskine gave a very systematic down-to-earth practical viewpoint of how it was to be done.
- Field: He felt that under the Constitution there shouldn't be any limitation [suffrage] on [the basis of] sex.
- Fry: At any rate, you were being seen together quite a lot in just suffrage activities alone.

Aftermath of Political Victory

- Field: Well, I at least learned that I could earn my own living. They paid me a very fair salary for that time. It wouldn't be considered much now. When the suffrage campaign was over and we won, instead of my feeling a great happiness I suddenly felt as if the world were empty, because I had neither that

Field: work nor the chance of seeing Erskine in the way I could when I was at work. I don't mean that I wasn't happy for the victory, because it was something I'd wanted ever since I can remember my feelings about women, which were very strong, but I mean that for my personal life there was suddenly a great emptiness.

About that time, I had to go to the--no, this is not the right sequence.

The McNamara Trial, down in Los Angeles, was scheduled, and I think due to Erskine's influence, because certainly I had no record in journalism, I was allowed to go down to the McNamara trial as news feature writer for the Oregon Journal, the evening paper, I think largely, as I say, from his plea to the editor, who was an intimate friend of his that I would be able to do it, but also because they knew I knew Clarence Darrow very well, who conducted the defense.

The McNamara trial was so intricate in all its significance that if you don't mind I would rather leave that until later.

Fry: You also went to Nevada. Before you leave Portland, bring us up to date on how your husband was feeling about this, and your children. When did you really start to live away from home?

Field: I didn't start to live away from home until after that trial was over, and the return was such agony, always excepting the fact that I enjoyed seeing the children. On the whole, the whole situation was so mixed and I simply couldn't live as a wife with Albert Ehrigott.

I think it was at this time, or perhaps it was after I came back from the McNamara trial, that I told him very honestly and very frankly that I had grown away from him, that he had married me at an age before one's mature thought has been formed, that I was not the girl he thought I was, because I did not hold to the views he did as to religious orthodoxy, or perhaps any religion, and that, this being so, I would have to get--we would have to have--some kind of separation. I did not mention the relationship with Erskine, because I felt that at that time the eventuality of our getting together was so far away. There was no use to make the wound any greater, it was hard enough to do this anyhow, because I didn't like to hurt him.

Now as I talk about it, and this is what talking with you does, I remember that I didn't tell him this until after I came back after the McNamara trial.

Fry: Had he been in favor of your work with the College Equal Suffrage League?

Field: Yes, he had been, and very generous about my absences and himself believed in it, though I don't think with any particular [inaudible], but the church didn't like it a bit. I was just doing everything the church didn't like at that time. I wasn't any kind of a leader in the church. I didn't go to the women's organizations in the church, and I was seen with a man whose reputation was, though as I have said he was greatly admired for his wit and wisdom and loved by a great many who didn't care what he believed, but also very much disapproved of by the first families in regard to his attitude toward women. And much of it was unjust, because he simply wasn't happy at home, and in the past if he'd found any woman, anybody halfway interesting, he had liked to see her.

Fry: But this was an intellectual hunger?

Field: Yes, it was. I don't doubt that he also had his defections, as it were, from absolute monogamy. I think that was possible. But many of them were just friendships which in themselves were suspect just because he was advocating these views publicly all the time, writing for the Pacific Monthly, which was an important magazine on the coast at that time, and he had a column every week in it under his own name, and contributed many things under other names simply because the magazine was failing. His friend, Charlie Land, had put \$50,000 into it so they couldn't afford to pay.

I must have explained this, didn't I? One of the things that before I had even met him, or just met him, that astounded me was to see this magazine and see these comments.

Fry: No, you didn't tell me that.

Field: I had too much to tell, the fullness of that time was so great.

Well, I had, and there wasn't a single one of the columns under which he wrote--in which he wrote under his own name--that wasn't either a very beautiful literary criticism of some book, such as an exquisite book that has just now I believe been reprinted, after all these years, called A Book of Tea (by a Japanese whose name [Kakuzo Okakura] escapes me but who wrote a most beautiful explanation of what the tea ceremony meant), and he would have a review of a book like that in it, or he would have some comment on an aspect of political affairs, which would be radical, and also, as I learned later, these beautiful stories which I am sad to say are all down now in Huntington Library. I soon learned [these] were written under pseudonyms, and I was overwhelmed by his versatility.

Fry: About when was this, do you remember?

Field: This was all before--I should have spoken of this--I had had more than just the kind of acquaintanceship, you know, that one gets at these early dinners that I spoke of, and then I think he sent a subscription of the magazine to me, and said, "You might like to see some of the views I expressed." Later (he didn't tell me at the time), I learned later that these amazingly beautiful stories largely were his. They were published in the East in little separate books, some of them, in little pamphlets. I think Benjamin Tucker, who was a great advocate in this country of philosophical anarchy, had had them published, and I had a whole set of those.

Oh, I should so love to have you read them. I deeply regret, as I told Mr. [George P.] Hammond at this interview the other day, that all this was placed in Huntington before Bancroft began its work of exploring the importance of what people had in their cellars and filing cases.

Fry: Our timing was sure off there.

Field: Mr. Hammond said he came in '46 and started this, and said that Mr. Coney said, "You know, one of the first things you must do is get all the papers and records of Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field, and their manuscripts, because we should have them here in the library." And then to his grief he found out they were all promised to the Huntington and had been for several years. They [representatives of the Huntington Library] came to us before my husband died (which was in '44)--some years before his death--and we were, as always, astounded that anybody wanted them, any library wanted them, so we had said, "Certainly, if you want them there, and they're of value to you." A promise is a promise.

I still manage to compromise a little with my conscience and have given a few things to Bancroft now, because I feel I've done my main duty with Huntington. I have to say, though, that Huntington has been very good to me in the sense that they gave a grant for two years, two summers, to young Edwin Bingham when he started using material down there to get a file, a card file, of the colonel's life preparatory to writing it, and that was very good, because otherwise he would have had to teach summer school and couldn't have worked on it. But the papers were so voluminous, it took him practically those two summers, really, to go through them, to make a card catalogue, and he got no time for the actual composition until later. I imagine it was always hectic, so he hasn't finished the book yet.

Fry: Well, maybe this recording will help him along a little.

[end of interview]

XV PERSONAL PROBLEMS AND POLITICAL EFFORTS

[April 12, 1961]

Notable Women Suffragettes

Fry: Tell me about Emma Wold.

Field: She had had all this rigorous training; she'd gone to prison; she'd been on hunger strikes; and she'd--they'd tried to forcibly feed her roughly; they'd done everything. British chivalry, I want to tell you, wasn't very much in evidence in regard to Emma during that time.

Why, Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kennedy, one of the dearest girls up from the working class (because they had all classes, as they call them in England, represented), went to a meeting in one of the big halls in London just to ask the new Labour Party, which had just--I mean, the Liberal Party--which had just been voted in, unfortunately with Asquith as prime minister; he was a deadly enemy of suffrage. They expected that most of the members of the Liberal Party would be with them, and they went in and there was one of the speakers--oh, my, our American women never came up to their quality--They spoke and they were roughly seized by stewards, as they called them, at the meeting and thrown out. You're not recording this, because this is in England, but I'm just trying to tell you how much background I feel sad [that] women don't know, how many women suffered. I won't go on very long with this, but I just want to say that. Then, of course, a somewhat angry group began to assemble when they were roughly thrown out of the meeting, and they then were both arrested and either fined or put in prison--they chose to go to prison--for obstructing the traffic. But just think, they just got up to speak, and were thrown out, just seized and thrown right out.

Fry: The difference between the English movement and ours over here, if I understand it, is that the English did have more violence

Fry: in theirs.

Field: Well, they did in that--oh, they were so terribly treated. They did a little sabotage, but it never was very serious. They broke some fences, I think, but we didn't do anything. We felt we could sabotage well enough here in America--and I think the wiser English people felt that, you might say, the property sabotage reacted not too well. We didn't do anything like that, but we sabotaged in the sense of organizing, going out against the candidates that would vote for it [women's suffrage].

Fry: Blackmail?

Field: Oh, boy, we just stood up and said, "Now, are you going to vote for a man who takes a stand against the political liberty of women?" In that way, we got hated by the politician, but feared. With eleven states of voting women behind us, when it came to a national election, they [women voters] counted.

Fry: The women have never been that unified since, I guess.

Field: It was one of the greatest experiences of my life, to feel this unification, and someone has said that not since the sex strike in the days of Lysistrata, when they all refused to sleep with their husbands to stop war--is that true in Greek history?

Fry: Well, I like to think it is.

Field: I like to think of it, too.

Fry: I often resort to thoughts like that when I hear the news.

Field: [Overcome with laughter briefly] Yes, wanting to go on strike--you mean you want to go out and organize. Our women, darling, have grown soft under beauty parlors. Oh, there was so much.

I've met the best that America has to offer. But I feel depressed about women today. They don't seem to get up any ardor about anything.

Fry: Eleanor Roosevelt stands out so far above everybody. I guess there's nobody that quite approaches her, is there?

Field: Nobody on earth that does approach her.

Well, you haven't been letting that [the tape recorder] go, have you?

Fry: Yes, I was testing. If you want me to, I'll erase it.

Field: Well, I don't see it's any use here. I was going to give you--

Had I taken you with me, dear, into Nevada? It wasn't till there I contacted Mabel Vernon and she said to me, "You've been working in these states so hard, you ought to join this party that is directly attacking the constitutional right of women to vote," and told me about it, and her earnest face and her wisdom convinced me, and I soon joined the Woman's Party.

Fry: But in Oregon you were in what--the College Equal Suffrage League?

Field: Yes, and that was a branch of the national society under Mrs. Catt's national suffrage organization, because there was no other. The Congressional Union, as we were called, was not organized yet. The Congressional Union was the first name we started on.

Fry: I want to ask you something about Oregon first, which kind of intrigued me in Mrs. Duniway's book, Pathbreaking. She tells of the organization of the women's club movement aimed at getting the women involved who were either uninterested or opposed to women's suffrage. I gathered just from the way she said it that this was a sort of sub rosa front organization for women's suffrage, and I thought you could tell us something about this. This is interesting from the viewpoint now where nothing like this would have to be done undercover.

Field: No, it wasn't sub rosa. It was right on the surface. Everybody knew that there were organizations forming.

Fry: Did they know its primary purpose was for women's suffrage?

Field: Yes, I'm sure they did. It's true, my life in Oregon was brief as I got this and worked in the College Equal Suffrage League. Certainly we didn't work sub rosa; we worked right out in the open. We went, as I think I explained to you, to all these little towns that hadn't been touched before. We covered the state with organizations and we got the papers in every place with us where we could. I always feel that I can't give credit enough, though to the pioneer work which had reduced the ridicule. At first you know it was nothing but ridiculous; it just sent men into either spasms of laughter or of anger, and sometimes of violence, in which they'd throw things.

Fry: In Oregon?

- Field: All over, in every state, I think. Wisconsin [Wyoming], as I told you, is the star state that came into the Union free, it [woman suffrage] was [provided] in the charter of the state. Women have voted since the very first period--did I say Wisconsin? I didn't mean Wisconsin, I meant Wyoming. No, Wisconsin had to gain it. I remember when Mrs. [inaudible] was working for it there. She became a staunch member of the Women's Party. She saw everybody who believed in conservation of women's energies and of money and also knew the despair of trying to convert the South--certainly some states of the South--ever. [She] believed that the only thing to do was to try it by a federal amendment, because we were sure with the North behind us and enough of the midway states and some, perhaps one or two more advanced Southern states, we'd get a two-thirds okay on it. And we did. Without a bit of trouble--went right straight through.
- Fry: Once you got Congress to put it up?
- Field: And then every man politician came to us, as Alice [Paul] said, came licking our hands, ones that we had had the worst times with, because they knew--after we got it--that they had made a mistake in alienating such an enormous women's vote. [Laughs]
- Fry: You would think that they would have been as eager to climb on the suffrage bandwagon as they are to dole out benefits to the veterans, which really don't constitute nearly as big a wad of voters as women were.
- Field: No, not at all.
- Fry: You know, the question of prohibition seemed to almost defeat some of the suffrage movement, both in Oregon and in Washington, and I was wondering if in your own personal experience you had come up against this.
- Field: No, I didn't, because as a matter of fact, the prohibition movement in Oregon was very well handled. It wasn't complete prohibition. They modified it to a question of state control and they don't grant any licenses to bars or stores; they're all government stores.
- Fry: And this was the issue at that time?
- Field: Well, it became the issue and we let it be known that it was going to be the issue, because we knew that they'd say, "Oh, this is all due to women who don't want their men to drink." The modification of it came almost immediately after its passage or very soon after.

- Fry: This issue went on simultaneously with the suffrage issue, didn't it? Did you have any trouble from WCTU workers?
- Field: Oh, no. They believed that women would always support anything that either prohibited or regulated liquor--I mean fanatical women--or put it under some kind of government control. It's awfully interesting when you go up to Oregon now. You have to go to a government store, and of course the prices are low because they're not in competition--no, I guess their prices are just the same, but you have to show a card and it's punched and you can get just so much per month. When I wanted to buy a bottle of liquor for my darling host and hostess I had to get my [inaudible] to go with me, to get it on her card. I presume a visitor could get a temporary license, I mean a temporary card, but I wasn't going to be there long enough for that.
- Fry: Well, I guess the idea I had was that the WCTU would gallop in ready to campaign free for women's suffrage, but in so doing they would alienate so many of the men's votes--
- Field: Whether I was too busy with my work in suffrage to be aware of any really important activity of WCTU or not, I don't know, but I can't recall that they were any obstruction to us at all.
- Fry: Well, sometimes when workers from the outside like that come in they don't go around to the little teeny communities like the ones you were working in.
- Field: No, and a state like Oregon was, and I think still is, so much of an agricultural state that unless you reached out into all those districts you didn't get very far, because there aren't very many [cities]. Of course, Portland's the largest city and there's Salem, which is a fairly good size and is the capital of Oregon, but on the whole the people that put suffrage over were the people where we went, in the farm districts, and it wasn't inspiring in the sense that we had big audiences. We just decided, never mind, never mind how many come; we'll keep at it until we have covered the state and they've all heard it. And curiously enough we got a much better response from those areas.
- Fry: The Duniway strategem of attacking the enemy at its weakest point. If you just had small crowds, that's fine, exploit them--
- Field: That's right. Exploit them, get them enthusiastic, and they'll go out and be missionaries. She [Mrs. Duniway] was a very--I think she came over in a covered wagon, anyway she did something that was marvelously pioneerlike. She had a deep, wonderful voice, and she'd been reared on the Bible. Every other point that she'd make she could illustrate with a Bible illustration,

Field: and even though she was so old by the time--pretty old, I don't know, maybe I just thought it was awfully old then, because I was so young, but it seemed as if she were very old. I just found her fascinating. It was so wonderful to see her run up against this powerful brother, who was the editor of the Portland Oregonian, the most important paper in Oregon, who thought suffrage was [inaudible].

Fry: She doesn't mention that in her book, and I wondered how she got around this lack of enthusiasm from a major paper?

Field: I wonder. Well, they had to carry the news, and it became news, but editorially they would always protest. But I think once a movement really begins to get a sweep and has had the right direction, with dedicated people who aren't using it for any political advantages of their own or anything like that, I have a strong feeling that it's just got to go through. I really did. I felt it even in the harder work of the federal amendment, where we went to jail and all kinds of things.

Fry: Another thing that Duniway seemed to be quite concerned about during this 1910 campaign was the offer of the National Women's Suffrage Association, who imported workers into Oregon, and she had pretty strong feelings about this--

Field: Did she really? I don't see why. It was a very nice act of California, which had just won suffrage, to send up two of their finest workers to help. They paid all their expenses, or California did; Oregon wasn't responsible for any of it. I don't know why--I'm glad you've been reading.

I must reread her book. It was so full of just pictures of little nonentities, people that had a [inaudible] chairmanship and all. I remember that it sort of put me up. But I know that it does represent, of course, a period long before I came, and that had paved the way, done the rough spadework. Heavens, how I admire that woman.

I must lend you a wonderful book Nancy Ross has written. It's not a suffrage book but--it's called Westward the Women--it's the story of those trails over, and what women endured. You know, what women can endure is something beyond your comprehension and nearly beyond mine, though I saw a few of the heroic women, because now women--I mean you know all those women you meet--they're nice women but they're not heroic women. They were heroic women, these older ones. I wasn't heroic, I was just coming in on the game that the pioneers had made, and I was young and I wasn't too bad looking. The papers in the

- Field: little towns would comment on that. They'd been used to always elderly women, you see, and those assets counted, but my God, that's very different from heroic dedication.
- Fry: Where all those pressures were against you.
- Field: Mrs. Duniway told me once that she went home absolutely stinking with the rotten eggs that had been thrown at her.

Emotional and Physical Strains

- Fry: I wanted to ask you about your then husband, because his name is mentioned in Mrs. Duniway's book a couple of times, once as being a delegate representing the state executive committee when they were planning the campaign, setting up the campaign organization, and once as representing the Men's Equal Suffrage League.
- Field: Oh yes, I think probably I've been very unfair to him in my recital, because [of] what I ran up against, and which brought out the worst of his nature, and that was religious fanaticism. It didn't represent all that he was. He was a strong believer in women's suffrage, and, as I think I have indicated, he had strong socialistic views, too, but he could not budge from any of the almost hard-shell Baptist ideas, and they clashed at times. I think he was bewildered himself sometimes as to why he was so liberal about some things and illiberal about others, and yet I don't know--he was awfully sure of himself. He was a man very sure of himself. He had to be, the more I--I'm older and wiser now and not so disturbed by the traits he showed later of almost malice and jealousy.
- Fry: You mean towards you or towards mankind in general?
- Field: No, towards Colonel Wood, who had helped him a great deal--I mean it was like, the Trojan horse, really, as if, you might say, he had crawled inside some protective power for influence and then broke out against him. At first, before I ever dreamed that I had the great change coming, he got into financial troubles and he wouldn't hesitate to go to Colonel Wood and get help. None of that seemed to be remembered in the days when he really knew I wasn't coming back any more. He didn't give up hope for years after I left, and then he did a thing which I think was despicable. He put detectives on me, and that's very hard to forgive, against the mother of his children.
- Fry: This was with the idea of bringing suit against Wood or something?

Field: I already had the divorce. That's another thing. He kept me living in that little town of Goldfield while he brought one demur [demurrer], as they call it, after another, against the suit, and if it hadn't been for a fine man that I got acquainted with in Reno, a lawyer, Mr. Hoyt, who had to come down to Goldfield often and saw me sitting alone with my little girl, and finally came over and said that he'd like to meet me-- He was a lawyer from Reno and a musician, and he said, "I hear from Miss Martin that you're coming up to help her"--she was the president of the suffrage campaign there--"and if I can do anything to help you--it seems to me whatever you're here for is dragging on and you don't look well."

The town didn't agree with me at all. I really was just out of the sanitarium when I went there--that TB sanitarium. Did I tell about that?

Fry: We just mentioned it in passing a couple of times.

Field: I cannot keep the sequence, darling, in my mind.

Fry: It was between the Oregon and Nevada campaigns that you went to the TB sanitarium, I guess.

Field: Yes, it was between those. But in the meantime, before I had made any break, I went down to the McNamara trial. I told you I knew I would have to earn my living, and then, as the suffrage campaign came on--or am I turning it around? I'm tired this morning. I tried not to be tired for you.

Fry: Anne Martin's campaign was in 1912, and 1914 was the campaign for the ratification by the male voters, but it came up in two sessions of the legislature, and it did that in '12 and '13.

Field: The McNamara cause was after that.* It was--of course, it was in between, because it was during the suffrage campaign that I broke down. I think I explained the Oregon suffrage [campaign] to you, that I had to travel in the heat of that terrible summer to these little places and hold meetings where there wasn't adequate hotel accommodation and I couldn't get any decent food. They'd be covered with flies; you'd see things all covered with flies. My hygienic sense taught me that wasn't a good idea, so I practically lived on some bananas and, when I could get milk that I could trust, milk and things like that. And with the psychological worries that were in my mind, because I have explained to you that

*The McNamara trial was held in Los Angeles, October-December 1, 1911. --Ed.

Field: I knew I couldn't go on living under the same roof with Albert Ehr Gott. We just weren't in love and we didn't see eye to eye, and that's that.

And yet what was I to do? How terrible it was to bring so much suffering on others, which has always been hard for me to do anyway, and with all that, Chita darling, I think it's no wonder that I got down to less than a hundred pounds, and I really was ill. And while I thought, as I told you, that when the colonel and I discovered we loved each other-- It was because he began so tenderly, had me come to his office; he was worried, and said, "I've had experience with TB with my son and I had to send him to Germany," and that's when I couldn't stand it and said, "No, it's not TB." I didn't think it was, but it proved to be. So then I went to a sanitarium-- (I'm so ashamed to have you come to me, darling, and take this time and not be sure--)

Fry: Well, you know, the dates are so easy to fill in later, Sara.

Field: It's a half-century ago, pretty near. I can't get it straight. I know I went down to the McNamara trial while I was still living under the roof of my husband, I won't say with him, and also I had an operation--I think I spoke to you about an operation that came in between, which was a godsend to me because I saw a great deal of the colonel then. He'd come to see me, you know; it was wonderful. And they kept you in hospitals longer after a thing like that than they do now, with this enormous population. I must get that chronology exactly right. I will.

Fry: Well, you went where to the sanitarium?

Field: I went down to Pasadena [winter 1912-13]. My case was such that I was not coughing and spitting and doing things to spread the disease, and the doctors thought that I could go, as I needed so much psychological rest anyway, to a sanitarium which was mostly for nervous people, with the understanding that the doctor there knew what was the trouble with me. I was taken care of by an old friend of mine who was a TB specialist; he'd come out to see me. None of the inmates knew; I lived in a little private cottage. There were little cottages spread all over. There was a main dining hall, but as I say there were none of the symptoms. I did have bad hemorrhages, but that's before I went, and there were none of the usual symptoms, except that I was pale and would get flushed in the afternoon, because with TB you get a fever in the afternoon, because it's an infection of the lungs, of course. But they were too busy with their own affairs to notice that, so I was--

Fry: You mean the other patients didn't know you had TB?

Fry: No. They all seemed to be fond of me, and I didn't mingle with them any, too much. So I stayed there, until I decided, between Dr. Earl Brown, who was my TB specialist (and an old college friend of my sister's at Michigan and had married her roommate; they lived down there and he had TB himself--he died of it--and he would come out to see me), and then the head of the sanitarium, who knew about it, would see that I had rather special food, highly nourishing, and I began to gain there.

That was before I left, because I remember how agonizing coming home was. I wanted to see the children desperately. Kay was down there, not at the sanitarium--Oh, I know. Yes, the McNamara trial did come before, because what she [Mary, her sister] was down for was--it [the McNamara trial] was followed by a trial of Darrow for perjuring the jury, and she, Mary, was writing that up. She was coeditor of a magazine that's gone under since, the American Magazine, it was called. She took care of Kay and would bring her out to see me, but Albert was left with his father and I got desperately lonely for him. Those were very intricately wrought times; everything was happening, all kinds of events, every one of which depended on another, in a sense. I must work that out.

Fry: Well, we can go on with suffrage this afternoon, and you can think about these more, if you like.

Field: I thought I'd given them to you in their order when my mind was a little clearer than it is today.

Fry: I think that we ran through them, and we were both unsure of the McNamara trial. I'm still unsure of it. We can look that up, and we'll want to talk about that at length.

Field: Yes, surely. In fact, when I get to that, I've got to come back to the library and work a little, because they won't let me take that wonderful thesis out [Roger Cole Searing, "The McNamara Case: Its Cause and Results"]--I mean wonderful to me--which I paid for having a copy made for Bancroft because it didn't seem fair that it should be over in the main library when it so concerned California history. I said to Mr. [John B.] Tompkins, "If I pay for the transcript of that, could you have a duplicate copy here, because this is pure Californiana. I have to trot over there and they only let me take it out when I call them, and I have to bring it back before I go home, and it would be much easier to get it right here where I'm working. So I've got a selfish interest, but I've also got a larger interest." He said, "Certainly." So I did pay for it and they've got it now.

Fry: I think we can get that out on my card, probably.

Field: They say they won't let any theses out on cards.

Fry: Well, I don't know. I've had one at home now for about six months.

Field: Oh, my Lord! There's the answer.

Fry: I should say this with the tape recorder on. [Laughs]

Field: What's the advantage to that being on? We've been talking in a desultory fashion.

College Equal Suffrage League

Fry: I wanted to ask you one more thing about the Oregon campaign before we leave it. Do you remember Mrs. Clara B. Colby?

Field: Yes, very well.

Fry: Could you explain what she did?

Field: She did very active work among the women's clubs in Portland. She didn't travel. Why, what does it say about her that made you particularly--?

Doesn't it say anything about Emma Wold? She was just a wheel horse; she didn't travel, but she made out all my itineraries and she was really--I think she was president of the College Equal Suffrage League, and she became through this all my closest and dearest friend. Then she went on to Washington to study international law and became quite famous, too, but she died young--fairly young.

Fry: There seemed to be a movement afoot to get in some new people, and they made some charges against Duniway, and Duniway thought that the leader of this movement was Clara Colby.

Field: Oh, she was a kind of a woman that wanted prestige. That's why I haven't spoken of her very much. As a person, I didn't admire her very much. One reason was that. Another reason was that I can't help but be suspicious of work that's done for self-glorification; you've got to do it out of the depths of your feeling about a thing to make it successful, and I never thought she did very good work, because she wanted to be the big person, or a big person.

- Fry: There were also some other ministers in here, along with your husband, who apparently--
- Field: They didn't do much work. They just loaned their names.
- Fry: And they would come and pronounce benedictions at meetings?
- Field: Exactly.
- Fry: Sara, were you in on the formation of College Equal Suffrage League when it was first established at the University?
- Field: Absolutely. I was there.
- Fry: Could you tell us something about that?
- Field: Oh, at the University?
- Fry: Wasn't it formed at the University of Oregon?
- Field: No, most of the members, I guess, had been there, but it was formed in Portland. You see, there'd never been a College Equal Suffrage League until this year when the temperature for suffrage had risen very much and the feeling of young women had [inaudible] that the old guard, no matter how wonderful they'd been in the past, were not adequate to handle the present situation.
- Fry: Was Birdie Wise, of Astoria, Oregon, the president?
- Field: I thought it--no, Emma Wold, I guess, was secretary.
- Fry: I mean of College Equal Suffrage League.
- Field: Yes, I'm talking about that, because that's when I had full connections. I'd only come to Oregon, and how I'd gotten acquainted with Emma I can't remember. I only know that I was overjoyed to find there was an active movement on. It had been pretty sluggish in Ohio; the emphasis there was so much on municipal ownership, and single tax, and those things, that there'd been no real strong drive for suffrage in Ohio. But when I got to Oregon I found that this drive was just about to get under way.
- Fry: This was the drive for ratification, wasn't it? The campaign you were on was for statewide voting of it; it wasn't a legislative thing?
- Field: It was coming up on the ballot for all the voters. That's why

Field: we felt it was so necessary to get out in the highways and byways. I don't know whether Mrs. Duniway records it. You see, I made the great mistake of not keeping diaries at this time, because there was a lot of interest happening, completely probably, vanished now from my mind. But as a matter of fact, I was so tied to the work of the College Equal Suffrage League, and though I wasn't a college woman in the general sense I had gone to college a good deal wherever I was and there was a college near. I had no degree, still I presume--I can't remember how they happened to appoint me. I think it was largely Emma Wold's influence. She perceived right away that I had had an extraordinarily liberal education in political things, even though I hadn't been able to participate in them with a vote in Ohio. She was convinced--I hope you'll understand that I say this with all modesty--though I have now grown so hesitant in speech, I was a good speaker then.

Fry: Yes, and you had the experience of speaking in Cleveland, too, before you came.

Field: Yes, and I know when some of the Englishwomen came out they said--and this is only recorded for reasons of explaining why [a woman] so much a stranger and with so little academic background was taken in. They came out to see what was going on in the Oregon campaign. They were very anxious about it, because they too saw that we must get a good voting power back of us after their experience. They said to Emma Wold, "We haven't heard any speaker in America that can equal her in this matter, because she's evidently thought about it so much and is so dedicated and has the facts and doesn't just sentimentalize about women. She really gives them the facts." And I really think that may have been true, though I think you know I say that without any feeling that it was anything due to me. If it was there it was because of the wonderful influences back of my life.

Fry: This is substantiated by the things that I have read of your speeches that you made in the national campaign, so I think it should be put down for the record.

The Suffrage Campaign in Oregon (1912)

Field: It was quite an emergence for a woman not yet out of her twenties, and I think I had the envy and not always the friendship of some of the more ambitious women in Portland. Perhaps, in Freudian fashion, that's why I can't remember many of them.

Fry: Well, there are a number of county workers here whose names I copied down, but I was wondering if perhaps you could just close your eyes and characterize the sort of worker who was interested in this thing--her age, her economic level, her other interests. Was there any one point of similarity between the women?

Field: Well, one can easily see why the pioneer women, who had gone through hardships unimaginable and shared all of them, all the hardships, with their husbands, would feel that women had a right to participate in the government out here, which they really were helping to make, in the sense that they had made this dangerous journey. That's easy psychology. And also you must remember that in these times there weren't as many diversions for women as now. The pressure wasn't so great, and women had more time.

The first sign, you see, of woman's feeling that she had some place outside of the domestic regime, I think, was the women's club, and in the women's club--there were clubs all over the country, not only in Oregon--there was a strong element, also some anti-, but also some strong element for suffrage. I would say that the more middle-aged women that were in that victorious campaign had been more or less exposed to the club life and had begun to feel very deeply that you could be perfectly true to your femininity and at the same time take part in government decisions. In fact, it was part of your femininity that you wanted to, because you realized the world was to be your children's home. They would leave your home, and I remember one woman saying to me, that impressed me very much: "My children will stay in my home as long as they're little, and then what do they go out into? They learn one thing in the home and another thing outside, and I'd like to help what they're going to live in outside." I think that characterizes the more thoughtful women of the clubs. The clubs were not very appealing to me as a rule. They seemed to study rather piffling things, but they were a help.

My own mother belonged to the Women's Historical Club and was much more sympathetic to my work in suffrage than my father. I think he was ashamed of me, and I think that is very interesting, because she was apt to want to side with him in all his decisions. But there was her wondrous liberal Quaker ancestry, which has never made any difference between men and women, except perhaps the singular sex difference--the difference that perhaps expresses a sex fear--that a man can't meditate very well with a woman right near him, so they sat on different sides of the room, [in] the old orthodox Quaker meetings. They don't [seat themselves this way], I think, now. I attended one in Swarthmore when I was East, a year ago last fall, and they were

Field: all mingling. There's none of that now.

And as for the younger women, there's no doubt about it, that the increased college attendance, the realization that the mind has a life of its own that is often stultified by doing only a round of domestic work, must have an expression somewhere and I think it took a very strong expression in Oregon. All the younger women I met that were in the suffrage [movement], naturally, being in the College Equal Suffrage League, had wakened up in college a lot. I can only characterize them in groups like that, not as individuals, because they varied greatly as individuals, as they always will in everything.

Fry: Sara, we keep coming back to the college element in the College Equal Suffrage League. Is that what the name meant, that it was college women?

Field: Yes. [Inaudible] they allowed it because I had taken work at Yale, I had taken work at Western Reserve in Cleveland, and, well, as one of the Oregon professors said, "She's more of a college woman than any college women I know." Anyway, I guess too, I had a drive and energy they felt they had to have to do this difficult work. There weren't many women that were willing to go out into the highways and byways of Oregon. It wasn't an easy job.

Fry: I wanted to ask you, in Oregon, did you have to do what some of the workers did in Nevada and camp out at night, or anything like that?

Field: No, I never did, but I often wished I could, because the hotels were not clean and there was no such thing as a motel in those days. I would gladly have camped out. I had been a camper at one earlier part of my life, and I would have loved it, but it wasn't feasible.

Fry: Did you aim primarily at the miners and farmers and labor groups? Was this primarily who you went to talk to? Or was it not that highly specialized?

Field: They were all kinds of groups. As I remember, there was a great deal of mining going on in Oregon. There was a great deal of agriculture--it was a country that was just beautifully adapted to the raising of certain kinds of good fruit. They were ranchers and farmers, and then they were small-town businessmen--in these little towns that would spring up in the midst of a farming community or a big ranching community. It was to those I spoke--every kind of person. Sometimes I had very small meetings, sometimes big ones. I tried to arrange as often as I could to speak from an automobile on the street. I found that

- Field: was more effective. People would stop to listen. Got better crowds that way.
- Fry: Better than if you what--hired a hall?
- Field: Most of the places (of course with the exception of Salem where I worked quite a little while), were too small to have any town halls, but we'd have a room somewhere, or a church where a minister was sympathetic would say, "You can come here." But the street meetings were, I think, the most successful ones.
- Fry: Could you describe how you did this? Did you simply get permission from the police in town?
- Field: I'm afraid I didn't. I'm not sure that I ever saw a policeman in many of the little towns. I think that it was just arranged by some member of the community in sympathy with the movement who had an automobile, and they weren't too common then, believe me, as they are now. They would have an initial group agree to be there at a certain hour, usually at dusk or early evening, so the men could be off, and we'd just start in. If there were only five, we'd start in. It was perfectly amazing to see how it would grow.
- I remember I was speaking on a street corner in Salem, which wasn't of course such a small town, and a man came up to me afterward and said, "You know, I had never thought about the justice of this movement before, but I really don't see how, under the arguments you've brought forward, it hasn't gone through long ago." Well, that's the way we'd get, you see, men that might never have gone to a suffrage meeting, never thought about it, as he said.
- Another time I was speaking--this was in Portland, because some of our street meetings there were very successful, too--and a man came up to me and he looked at me very intently and then he said after the meeting, "Are you the sister of Mary Field?"
- I said, "I certainly am."
- And he said, "There's a strong resemblance. She was a student of mine at the University of Michigan." He taught the philosophy of history at the University of Oregon. He had to come West because of the health of his wife. So he came there.
- Fry: Were you also able to recruit men and women from groups who would come up to you afterwards and show interest?

Field:

Oh, yes, and [we'd] give out pamphlets. We had loads of literature you know, and we would give them out and beg them to read them, take them home with them. I think the most eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of all this--and the work of others that was steadily going on in Portland, where the main center was--is that we won that year. After all, it had come up year after year after year. I was so grateful.

The first call I made was on Mrs. Duniway. I remember taking her a big bunch of roses. I was really on my knees to that woman. She was too frail then to be out, but Erskine had told me already about how this wondrous deep contralto voice (with all this Biblical--she had almost a Biblical way of speaking), [this] impressive voice--how it had gone down the years working. In a way it seemed a kind of shame that we young upstarts should come along and be the ones that won it finally, but it wasn't we who won it finally, it was we who clinched what had been done by such women as she.

Fry:

Well, she still had a lot to do with the planning of this campaign, didn't she?

Field:

Oh yes, she was consulted on all sides, because she had in her day done a great deal of organization work--never as thorough as this and never with the vigor and appeal. I don't think that she trusted young people very much. I really do think that the fact of youth getting into it [helped]. I'm sure that was true, as I will explain later, in the Woman's Party. They have energy; like Jeanne D'Arc they have a vision; they're willing to go to any prison; they're willing to do anything, because the cause is all.

Fry:

Well, do you have any other anecdotes of what happened when you were traveling around to the farmers and ranchers?

Field:

I had probably by calling on my subconscious thought of anecdotes in larger areas of the movement, and I hadn't thought of the detail of it. I was of course very much ridiculed at times, and had unpleasant things written, sometimes anonymous letters, even (which always seemed to me a little dastardly--you can at least sign your name to it), that I couldn't answer. But I can't remember for the most part that I met anything but kindness. The state was too well ready for it by that time. It was ripe for the picking. And whatever incidents I had were just funny incidents of the absurd way I had to live. You'd think, well, you'd buy yourself something in a bakery instead of trying to eat that fly-covered hotel dinner, and then you'd go into the bakery and find the flies all settled. In that respect it was a little unhygienic.

Fry:

Gee, no wonder you couldn't eat anything!

- Field: No, I couldn't, and also I think I was--one paper said I was aflame, just burning up with this. Well, I suppose I was. I was just determined that Oregon was going to reap the results of all this work of women who had slaved so long to get it. Their methods were old-fashioned and it was time for this new group to come in, but as I say it only came in on all that had been sown before. The grass was green from their sowing.
- Fry: But you did have some opposition from people who would write you letters and so on?
- Field: Oh, strong opposition. I remember when I made one of the final speeches at what was then the very swank--I think it was the Multnoma Hotel or the Portland Hotel--anyway it was in one of the big auditoriums there, and it was largely attended by society people, and both Erskine and I spoke. Whether the rumor had been getting around of us, I don't know, but I had a very cold reception there, and some people refused to meet me. Some of it may have been on the ground of gossip and some on their strong anti- [anti-suffrage position]. I have to laugh, my dear, that my own dear stepdaughter, who later got into Congress, opposed suffrage. And yet when the Roosevelt boom came (and Oregon's a very Republican state), which was at the time of our very worst depression, Oregon for the first time went Democratic and they voted her in as Congresswoman. I've never been mean enough to say to her, "Do you realize you led that clique"--she was very much a social lion--"that opposed suffrage right down to the last?"
- Fry: Well, she must have been about your age.
- Field: She is my age. And she worked quite hard in the anti movement.
- Fry: Were those who were in the anti-suffrage movement usually women of good social status?
- Field: In the anti movement? Either that or such extraordinarily ignorant women, who just couldn't get over the idea that woman's place was in the home, in spite of a thousand times being told that the home now didn't have such limitations of boundary. It affected you in every direction outside, and affected your children. I would say those extremes, yes. The middle class really are the class that usually carry a new movement. I suppose now that labor has become more strong and educated and has such wonderful men in it--well, let's say there's Charles Morgan [Edward Morgan is meant], whose broadcast I can't bear to miss, and I listen every night to his commentary--and men like Reuther. They didn't have men like that in those days. I think now labor is a strong liberal element in our society.

Fry: Do you remember whether the issue of taxation without representation was talked about much?

Field: You mean a single tax?

Fry: No, apparently, as I understand it, some of their political advisers had talked to Mrs. Duniway and some of the others, and suggested that just before this time taxes had become suddenly prominent on the American scene--income tax and all that--and they decided to try a new tack and ask for a resolution or a Congressional--what do you call it when it goes to the voters?--referendum so it would be an amendment that no person who is a taxpayer shall be denied the right to vote on account of sex, and connect this with the Revolutionary idea of taxation without representation, and I wondered if you remembered anything about that?

Field: Well, I do remember that that came into the arguments some, but it was so easy to demolish it because there were so many women then that were financially prosperous.

[coffee break]

A Decision Made

Fry: While you were in the sanitarium in Pasadena [1912-13] after the Oregon campaign, and after the McNamara trial, you had a lot of time to think, and I was wondering if you were able to resolve any of the conflict going on in your personal life at that time?

Field: Yes, I think I was. I thought it through over and over again. I had all the time in the world there, and I knew, as I think I have mentioned before, that both for the children's sake as well as my own and even my husband's (as it turned out to be after long long years for him), I resolved that going on living in this status was not healthy, and that it must come to an end. And so I wrote to Darrow, and I told him that I had come to this conclusion, and that the first thing I must do would be to get a divorce, and that I didn't want to live in Reno, where the divorce colony is so notorious and so much in the public eye. He wrote me back and said, "Go to Goldfield. It's a little town, played out now; it was a very active mining town where they did find lots of gold in the earlier days. It isn't an exciting life there--it's almost dead, but there is a very liberal judge there that I know, and your grounds are not

Field: grounds that anybody but a liberal judge could understand because your husband is what the world calls a good man, certainly a moral man. And I think that's your best bet."

So I did this. I went to the head of the sanitarium. He had seen that I was in great mental conflict and he agreed with me that I had gotten well enough to go. So I went to Goldfield, taking little Katherine with me, my daughter. I ought to say that during my period at the sanitarium, after I had written my husband about my resolve, he sent Albert down (who was then about--he must have been about twelve years old) to see if he couldn't persuade me to come home. He knew the great bond between us. It was there that I found he was old enough for me to tell him the whole story, and he cried, he wept, that I wasn't coming home any more, but I said to him, "Darling, I shall make a home for you and eventually Pops--" as he called Colonel Wood, whom he loved dearly--"Pops will come and we will have a home all together." I think he lived the latter years for that, and he became one of the most wonderful allies I had, because he would write to me and mail the letters when his father didn't see them. Not that there was anything that he ought to conceal from his father, but it was because he felt that he could write me more fully that way. The wonderful thing was that a child of twelve could be told the truth (it taught me a great lesson, that we don't trust children enough) and understand and accept even at a very great sacrifice to themselves--or to himself--and that cleared up--I felt very much more satisfied that he understood and knew that I wasn't just deserting him.

This was one of the hardest decisions I made in my whole life, on account of him, because he had this quality that the Italians so beautifully call "simpatico" and I needed him very much in my life and I think he needed me. But that was the way it stood.

So I went on to Goldfield [1913]. I found it just as Darrow had described it, a dusty, desolate, deserted little Nevada town with the very minimum of activity going on in the mines. There were still some veins that one company persisted in trying to work, but on the whole there was very little going on. There were a few stores; there was one hotel; and there was a bank--which later collapsed; and that was about all. I managed to get a little house--I would call it more a cabin than a house. I can't now remember how it was furnished. (It seems to have been furnished. Perhaps there were some people who thought they might come back some day.) There I lived with little Katherine during the long period of trying to get my divorce. It ought to have gone through quickly in Nevada, as you know it can, but my husband put every obstacle in my way.

Field: He was determined I shouldn't get it. He had done nothing wrong, of course, in the eyes of the law, and he hadn't accepted--Nevada does accept mental cruelty, and there had been times when he had tried to enforce me into beliefs I could no longer hold.

Fry: But you couldn't get a divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty without his agreement?

Field: Well, I could, and did in the end, but not without these [demurrers], as they called them, bringing up legal objection after legal objection. He hired a lawyer to do that, so that the case dragged on and on.

Katherine and I took our dinners at night--there wasn't very much equipment in the house for getting good meals--at the main hotel. It was there that after a long period of residence, I would say much like almost nine months or more, that a gentleman came over to the table and said to me, "Aren't you Sara Bard Field?"

And I said, "Yes."

And he said, "This is your little daughter?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, I think that Anne Martin told me to look you up, that you were here, and she wants you to come up and visit her very much."

So I did go up to visit Anne, taking Katherine, and there I saw something more of this gentleman, who was a lawyer named Mr. Hoyt; he was a lawyer for the main interests, I think, such as they were in Nevada.

He said, "I don't mean to be curious, but aren't you out here for a divorce?"

And I said, "Yes."

He said, "Why does it take so long?"

And I said, "Because I don't think I have a very efficient lawyer"--she was a woman lawyer named Bird Wilson, very kind and good, but with not very much energy to her--"and partly because my husband is very obstinate about this and is determined that I shall not get a divorce."

And he said, "Well, if Miss Wilson, whom I know, doesn't object, will you let me handle this for you? It won't cost you

Field: anything." He was interested, you see, in this long stay of mine there; he didn't think it was very good for me, I think. It ended in his bringing it to a head very quickly. Just how he did it, I've forgotten.

I stayed with Anne Martin and her mother, who had one of the fine old houses in Reno. Her father had been the chief banker there, and she had been brought up to live a very healthy outdoor life. She was a marvelous horseback rider and camper, and also an almost fierce woman suffragist. She was about to launch a very vigorous campaign, and she asked me if I would help her in it, since I'd helped in the Oregon campaign and knew something about what organization work was. I agreed to do so, as much as possible, but I said, "I'll have to go back to San Francisco first, Anne, and establish some kind of home for myself and my daughter." I had hopes, you see, that I would have her, at least. But I remember now that the stipulation that Mr. Hoyt had to accede to, to get the divorce at all, was that the children would live with their father and come to me weekends, and I would have access to them at all times. So I had to go home and get a place where they could come to, to San Francisco, and I found a little flat, I suppose you would call it. It was part of a house that is now historical in San Francisco. It was brought all the way around the Horn, for some reason, and then the husband and wife quarrelled and they split the house in two, and one took one half off and the other was left. I lived in the upper story of this half-house. I got the rent, as I remember it, at the unspeakably low price--something like \$12 a month--and Anne had promised me a small salary for helping her in Nevada.

New Efforts for Woman Suffrage

So when I'd established myself there, and the children had learned to come weekends and we'd had happy times together, I did go to Nevada. As I remember it, the Colonel had come down to visit me, and he went into Nevada--no, that was later, when she ran for the first--she was the first woman to run for senator. No, not in the suffrage campaign.

While there [in Nevada], I met a young woman named Mabel Vernon, who had been sent out from an organization that I had not yet heard of (it was very new), called a Congressional Union, and she said to me, "This state-by-state business has got to stop. We'll never live to see it in our generation and we ought to; it's really been since the French Revolution."

Field: And I said, "Well, what can be done?"

"Well," she said, "I must tell you about this organization that I've been sent from. They sent me because they want as many states [as possible] to get the vote, and they think Nevada has a good chance, and they want all the political backing they can get. But as a matter of fact they're going to try for a federal amendment to the Constitution, which will at one sweep end this long struggle of centuries.

And then she described Alice Paul to me. She said, "She's the most extraordinary woman. She's no bigger than a wisp of hay, but she has the most deep and beautiful violet-blue eyes, and when they look at you and ask you to do something, you could no more refuse--"

So I was interested in this organization. I said, "What are you doing?"

She said, "Well, we've got some backing from England, the Englishwomen have won it [suffrage] by a very militant method, and we're going to have mildly militant methods. We're going to hold the party in power responsible, as they did. If the party is in power and has the power to pass this amendment and doesn't, then we'll go out against the candidates, no matter if we're Democrats or Republicans.

And she said, "This summer--" this was in the fall [1914], you see, that this campaign was being waged in Nevada--"we're going to have a booth at the beautiful 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, [with] great signs, and there'll be hundreds of thousands of women from all over the western states, as well as everywhere, and we're going to have a great petition to President Wilson."

Fry: And therein lies another story.

Field: So it was meeting her there that turned me. I saw at once (it didn't take a very smart mind to see at once) that to gain suffrage by an amendment to the Constitution, as the Negroes had gained it (although poorly applied, poor things) would indeed be a great saving of women's strength and women's money. Also [it would] release them for what I also had so deeply on my heart--the cause of peace (as I thought, though that didn't turn out to be so, alas). But that was later history too.

I said to her, "Well, I'm going back to San Francisco, and I will watch for this at this World's Fair, and I shall do what I can in connection with this booth to further what will be

Field: helpful." And that, as you say, is another story.

Fry: Now, when you were in Nevada, what exactly did you do? Was yours a traveling type of job?

Field: Yes, not as extensive as I had done in Oregon. I was just sent wherever the need was felt to be greatest. I went to places like Elko, Nevada, and many little towns whose names I cannot recall without looking at the map. I would speak there. One of the fascinating things was that at one little town, which was in the heart of the great sheep-raising district of Nevada, I held a meeting on the porch of the only hotel in that town, and who should stalk into it, in boots, but Mr. William Kent, Sr., who had a huge sheep ranch out there, bringing his two sons, one of whom was Roger (who is now head of the [California] Democratic Party and will never forget that event). But we didn't often have such picturesque visitors as that. We had plenty of different kinds.

Fry: Let me ask you about this one man who apparently took it on himself to be the focal point of opposition, George Wingfield. He threatened to leave Nevada if the women won, and take all his banks with him?

Field: Yes, and he was the biggest, I suppose, financial man in Nevada. The curious thing is that this Mr. Hoyt, who helped me to get my divorce (so I don't suppose he did it to help me get suffrage, but he did have great admiration for Anne Martin--he'd known her father well and known the whole family), he was his attorney; he was George Wingfield's attorney. I can't tell you how many interests in Nevada that man owns. I mean he owned everything, and why he should have been afraid of women's suffrage in Nevada I have never yet fathomed, because Nevada was then even more heavily populated by men than women. They would always have dominated any legislature that came up, but I suppose he feared some harm to his various monopolies and properties there. He opposed us every place he could.

Fry: There was not much press support, was there, because the Reno Evening Gazette, as I understand it, was pro-suffrage as long as Senator George Nixon's widow was running it? But apparently George Wingfield somehow became influential--or else he owned part of it--and it changed.

Field: Yes, we had a minimum of press support. It was simply marvelous that we got it through. You know, more than any state I've ever been in to work, there is a curious chivalry on the part of men there. It was a rough chivalry. It didn't resemble King Arthur's knights in many ways, except that they really held women in high

Field: esteem, and the rank and file of men believed that they would do a lot to help purify government. I think it was an interesting commentary on a state that was so predominantly masculine. Wingfield was an exception, he really was, and perhaps much of the pro-suffrage advocacy was due to the fact that he was cordially hated by so many.

Fry: Yes, he had so much that other people didn't have.

Field: I know. And he lived wholly for himself and his own interests.

Fry: There was a statewide antisuffrage society, which was a part of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage that was made up largely of women, with Minnie Bronson as its general secretary. They sent out women from the East to campaign against it. Did you run up against any of these?

Field: No, not that I remember. I don't remember that I ever spoke in Nevada on a platform that had an opponent, and I never had such enthusiastic audiences. I don't know why they didn't put an opponent in there. Maybe they thought, "Oh, that's just a slip of a girl. She wouldn't need an opponent." But I didn't.

Mr. Hoyt was a cultured gentleman himself, a good musician (I mean amateur musician); [he] played the piano and loved music and loved literature--

Fry: Excuse me, this was the night you were invited to his house with Anne?

Field: Yes, and that night he had another lady guest who was quite an accomplished musician. I should probably remember her name, because I think she was a concert pianist. Anyway, she played Chopin very beautifully, and I went home--or back with Anne that night--and I wrote what Mr. Hoyt said was one of the best poems about music he'd ever seen. I don't know that I ever published it in a book because I felt it was a young poem, but I remember the very words it began with, "Softly and slow, she strikes a minor chord upon the waiting ivory of the board--" that's the way it began, you see.

Fry: You remember it?

Field: Well, I remember it for some reason. I can't imagine, because I almost never remember. I think that I had been so starved during this period for some kind of culture other than I could have by myself. I had taken books with me, but I didn't meet any people of culture in Nevada during that long and painful period of getting my divorce. And to go to (Mr. Hoyt himself was a

Field: bachelor)--but to go to an apartment that was tastefully furnished and not too much so, but just tastefully, and hear the talk of books and music struck me and awakened this really deep urge. And I happened to remember those lines. But I remember I sent him a copy and said, "This is what came to me after the evening at your home." He wrote me a perfectly beautiful letter about it. He said, "My dear, that is a beautiful poem and you mustn't destroy it." I said something about [inaudible], you know, and I thought it was. But it hadn't been written just like that, it had been written out of some kind of long and deep urge for the things that meant most to me, aside from suffrage, of course.

But that I don't think it's necessary to report, but I thought you'd like to know. Because after all my books of poetry, if there's anything good in them anywhere, are the only things that will count. I know Mr. Hammond spoke yesterday--the other day, I mean, when I was visiting him up at the library--they not only wanted them in the general library but they want a whole set of them in Bancroft. Mrs. [inaudible] who called him the other day has given me a list of Erskine's things that it frightens me to try and think where I'll find them now, because I sent nearly everything out. They feel perfectly sick about it. He said--did I tell you this before, about Mr. Hammond and how he said that he didn't come before--?

Fry: He came just too late to get your husband's things?

Field: He said that this was one of the greatest losses to the University that we've had. I think he especially referred to Erskine's papers that had to deal with his father's connection with the acquisition of California, because that was of course a vital matter.

Fry: Oh, that is a shame! Well, maybe we can have a pneumatic tube installed between Bancroft and Pasadena in the future.

Field: I think it's very wrong, and I said it to Mr. and Mrs. Bliss--they've been here since you were here to have lunch with me the other day. He retired as librarian but they keep him on. Mr. Huntington himself respected him so, and he put him in as librarian as a young man. And I imagine he made some provision that even after he would retire as librarian he would always retain as long as possible some connection with the library, because he is now what they call field secretary. He goes around and gets all these historical things that he hears of, and I said to him then (I've seen him down the years so much that we're all on a first-name basis), "Leslie, you know,

Field: I really feel it's very wrong that you and Bancroft are in such competition." I said, "Bancroft really was originally dedicated to things that had to do with the Northwest, its history, its culture, everything that had to do with the development of the Northwest. And if they had asked me first they should certainly have had all the papers, but Mr. Hammond didn't come in till '46 and you'd asked me for them."

He said, "Glad I am I did. Sure, we're in competition."

But I said, "Look, Leslie, you also had loads of money left by Mr. Huntington"--you know that he was one of the Big Four--"to buy these marvelous old manuscripts and first editions of very expensive books and all that kind of thing, and why couldn't you have been contented with that kind of collection?"

"Well," he said, "we just decided to go into this and Bancroft hadn't done it"--and they hadn't--"and we couldn't know that Bancroft would do it someday. And now we are, we're in competition with one another."

They each try to get ahead of the other in--

The Campaign Trail in Nevada

Fry: I wonder if you could give a little graphic description of what it was like to travel around in Nevada at that time [1914]. The thing that's so striking is that there were so few people in Nevada and they were spread out over such a wide area. How did you travel, by train?

Field: We traveled by train, and sometimes I had really rather exciting experiences. There was one experience I had in Virginia City I'll never forget as long as I live. I shouldn't tell this because it's part of the history, you might say, of Virginia City. Virginia City, as you know, had been the center of the great mining period, when they were just pulling silver out of the mines by the tons, and they had built this big lavish hotel there where the beds were all hung with red velvet curtains on the side. By the time I came along Virginia City was pretty much what it is today, almost a forsaken city as far as any enterprise went on, and when they gave me a room (I had to stay all night there for some reason--there wasn't any train out, that was why, for me to get back to Reno after my meeting, so I had to stay there all night), and when I went to my room I just sat down on the chair and laughed myself sick all by myself. Here

Field: was all this old faded plush and these great chandeliers and this whole thing and little me in the middle of it, and none of it by this time too attractive, and funny old plumbing equipment and generally just a relic of the past, and I enjoyed that because I could see what it was.

I had said to the hotel clerk when I registered, "Oh, I wish there was a train out tonight. I need to be in Reno tomorrow for a very important meeting, and this train you tell me leaves tomorrow isn't going to get me there in time."

"Well, that's just too bad, lady. There 'tis, we can't make a train go out if it doesn't go out."

So I went to bed resigned that I couldn't get there, and I had just fallen asleep when [there was] a terrible pounding on my door--if you could know how a thing like that sounded, like the knock in Macbeth, just as that old castle would echo and reverberate this old hotel echoed and reverberated. I said, "Who's there?"

And the clerk said, "It's I. You can get to Reno now."

So I put on my robe and I went to the door and said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "There's some men downstairs. They're going to go back to Reno tonight and they said they'd take you along."

Well, I was of course a fool. It turned out all right so perhaps I wasn't, because I made all my dates, but you know there is a terrible pass between Virginia City and Reno. I for years knew its name and maybe we could look it up. It's still known as one of the steepest and most dangerous passes.

Fry: What vehicle were you using?

Field: Oh, an auto of that vintage. When I came out here were four men--I mean I got dressed and packed my little suitcase and came down--here were four men that were so stewed that they wanted to begin making love and do things like this right off, and I was just--I'm always nonplussed under those circumstances.

I didn't like to say to them, "Well, after all, I've changed my mind and I don't want to go." I almost indicated it to them because they said, "Oh, well, lady, you'll be all right. You'll be safe." Well, I was, as far as any more unpleasant approaches of that kind, but we came to this pass, and, my dear, we went down it at a speed that was so terrifying, and on the other

Field: side lay this deep chasm. I never thought I'd get to Reno alive, but I did. We went down it and got there. I don't remember whether I was still staying with Anne or I went to the charming, really charming hotel--even then it was--right on the Truckee River. I was shaking all over, I was in such terror of them, because they weren't in any condition to drive, you know, safely.

Well, that shows you something of the hazardous undertakings you took in Nevada. The other times you just went on slow-pokey trains through what seemed endless distances of desert land, and would arrive at these little hot towns, but always there was a nice welcoming committee. They were very nice about that.

Fry: This was organized, then?

Field: Yes. She [Anne Martin] had charge, not I, then, and she had a welcoming committee and she had arrangements where I was to be put up and all this, so that was nice too.

Fry: You know, Anne speaks in her memoirs of the good therapy that she received when she had to camp out at night on these long stretches, when they couldn't make it to the next ranch house before nightfall and would simply curl up.

Field: Well, she had been, I will say, pretty well conditioned to do that by her father. He was disappointed in not having a boy, and he almost made a boy out of her. I mean, she was a crack shot, and as I told you a very able horsewoman--she could do anything with a horse. She must have camped out a great deal as a young girl. [Inaudible] just coming back, in the meantime she'd done a great deal of study--she'd graduated from Stanford. Didn't she also go to Oxford for a year or two?

Fry: Well, I don't know. She didn't mention that, but I think she had been a professor of history at the University of Nevada.

Field: Yes, she had been a professor of history there.

Fry: Did this show up in the sort of ardor she had for the suffrage movement? Did she have a sense of its deep historical significance?

Field: Oh, very much so. That was why--among other reasons--I was under the impression that she had been in England, because she had seen what that movement was there in 1908 and '09 when the women were going through their worst struggle in England. They didn't get it [suffrage] very long before we did. They were very generous in helping us when we started to do the same kind of thing--they

Field: didn't believe in the state-by-state thing.

Fry: Yes, I think that some of those women even came to Nevada to help, and I wondered at the time what they must have thought of Nevada.

Field: Well, I remember that the Patrick-Lawrences came out--one of those hyphenated husband-and-wife names--who were very ardent suffragists. I'll tell you a wonderful woman, who was getting along in years and so couldn't do much, but she came over just to give the dignity of her presence--Cobden's daughter, who married Sanderson--I have a beautiful book by him, they probably made the most beautiful books at that time--the Cobden-Sanderson Book Bindery, and they also hyphenated their names. She was so proud of her father's record. You know, he was really responsible for passing the wonderful Corn Laws in England. He'd always stood by suffrage, way back, and she'd been just brought up on it, so while she was getting along in years--her husband had died--she came over and I remember she stayed with me for a night or two and I never had a lovelier visitor.

Fry: In Nevada?

Field: No, I mean when I came back home after that summer and we had that booth at the Fair [the Panama-Pacific Exposition] that I told you about. That was in 1915.

Fry: Were you able to stay through the whole campaign and see the victorious end of it?

Field: In Nevada? Yes.

Fry: What did you do when the vote came in?

Field: Well, we held a great big festival meeting, just had speeches-- We had people who'd worked a long time there tell how they felt about it, and the younger people tell how they felt, and so on.

Fry: You're getting pretty tired, aren't you? I was going to ask you about Prohibition in Nevada but we can take that next time.

Field: Well, I don't know much about that, darling, I left the state and came back to California, and I didn't go into the state again until--I don't know--I went in to give her [Anne Martin] a little lift. I spoke two or three times and then my husband went in, too, with me. (Erskine wasn't my legal husband then, but we decided we weren't going to--)

Fry: He was your husband de facto, hm?

Field: Yes, in every sense of the deep sense of the word. And we went into the state and he made some very able speeches for Anne.

Fry: Well, I was thinking more of Prohibition in its relation to the suffrage movement there, before it was won.

Field: Well, you see, I was kind of new out in the West here, and I don't know much about the Prohibition--I didn't realize there'd been a Prohibition movement until you spoke of it. You bring things back now.

Fry: Well, it was more of a fear than a reality.

Field: I was going to say, I can't imagine a Prohibition movement in Nevada.

Fry: I think this was simply a fear on the part of the enormous male population there--I mean enormous in proportion to the female population, that if women got the vote all their favorite pastimes might be taken away from them, and I thought maybe you had run up against this.

Field: [Laughs] Favorite pastimes--love the expression. Well--

Fry: But you didn't have to go into the saloons and make reassuring speeches or anything?

Field: Oh, no. I didn't do anything about Prohibition at all, ever. I never had any official connection with it one way or the other.

Fry: Did you do any writing for the newspapers--for either the Oregon or the Nevada campaign?

Field: Well, it's very easy to verify that. I think I did do some writing but it must have been very slight, because I didn't have much time for it.

Fry: You were primarily speaking.

[end of interview]

XVI DARROW AND THE MCNAMARA TRIAL

[April 26, 1961]

Novice Journalist

- Fry: Sara, how would you like to begin your story of the McNamara trial?
- Field: Well, Chita, I would like to say that the background of the bombing of the Los Angeles Times, with its consequence of the McNamara trial, has been so ably set forth in a thesis by Richard Cole Searing* that every student studying the history of the labor union movement should if possible read it. A copy of it is in the General Library of UC, and another copy in the Bancroft. Many others in newspaper and magazine articles have written about the period before or after the trial, or both, so that it will not be necessary for me to go deeply into those details.
- Fry: I agree. Let's try to get at some of those things that haven't been covered so well.
- Field: Well, I think that all I can do to add anything--though it doesn't seem very important to me--is my own witnessing of it.
- Fry: Now let's see. You went down just as the trial was beginning, is that right?
- Field: Yes, just as the trial was beginning. I think that it's important for you to remember in relation to what you want on these tape recordings that I had never even been in a courtroom before. I didn't know legal terminology nor did I have much understanding of how any such trials were conducted, much less this important one. I think the Oregon Journal [Portland], which gave me the job of writing the feature stories for it, was very brave to send me,

* "The McNamara Case: Its Cause and Results," M.A. thesis (UCB), 1952.

Field: so inexperienced as I was, but they seemed to have faith in me, largely because Colonel Wood assured them that I was able to do it and he being a lawyer ought to know.

So--October 14th., [1911] was it?

Fry: That the trial began? It was October something. The selection of the jury began October 11.

Field: Well, I was there when the selection of jury went on, because that took a long time, so I must have gone down very early in October, maybe the very first of October.

Fry: Were you there when they had the very first hearing, at which the brothers pleaded not guilty, in July?

Field: No, I was not there in July.

My sister had been sent out by the American magazine (a magazine which was excellent but for some reason went out of business some years later) to write up the McNamara trial for that magazine, of course not telegraphic dispatches but a very seasoned article on the whole trial, which she had to observe. When I got down she had already found a little apartment, and we shared that apartment during the trial.

Many times during it (I will say, for fear I forget it) dear old Darrow, who was really worn out when he came and was not at all well, would come up to see us, and sometimes he'd just sit in silence, but it seemed to comfort him to be there.

The paper said to me, "Now, you can use your own judgment as to the kind of stories you send us. We want, of course, the dramatic element that will be in it, we want that felt, and other than that we have no special instructions for it." So I went down pretty free, and pretty scared.

Fry: How did the Oregon Journal look upon labor? Was it a conservative paper, or fairly liberal?

Field: All Portland was conservative. I can't gauge, even now, how deeply conservative they were on the matter of labor, because you have to remember, I hadn't been there--we came in 1910, and I'd been there a very few months. The judgment I would have from knowing Portland is that it would be extremely conservative about labor, and that there hadn't been a great deal of unionizing there. I know that Colonel Wood--and later I--went to the labor union hall in Portland to speak on various subjects

Field:

many times, and as I remember it there was a small portion of the workers that had been unionized, and the talk was all about the necessity of unionization if the workers were to get any kind of justice in the world. Our hearts were with them, and our minds as well. It was only after I had been to the McNamara trial that I made any speeches in regard to labor.

I cannot express enough gratitude to the fact that in my past--thought I was still not out of my twenties--I had already had the wonderful influence in my life of Tom Johnson and the group that surrounded him and the whole history of his life, which I loved and read and knew. (It just occurs to me that the woman who wrote a life of him, which I thought I had but can't find, was named Elizabeth Howitzer.) All the struggle that he had gone through before we got to Cleveland and that I saw him still making when we did get there was very fresh in my mind. And also I had met Darrow and knew from him a good deal about labor problems, knew all about the [William D.] Haywood case, which he had just finished trying, a long and desperately bitter case. I knew all about the fact that the socialization of all public utilities was being preached by Debs all over the country. You see, he had been polled--he ran for president five times, and on one of those occasions he polled over three million votes, which in a country that hadn't yet expanded to the present growth was a very large minority groups--so large that later (this is an aside) Theodore Roosevelt took wholesale planks out of Debs' program to put in [his own platform] when he was trying to form that new party which never really emerged.

So I had that influence back of me and it was natural that I slanted all my news articles towards labor. In the first place, there was very little belief, except on Harrison Gray Otis' part, and the kind of fanatics he associated with, that the McNamaras were guilty. There was even a suspicion that Otis had planned all this himself. There were very suspicious facts. He'd established another office, printing office, already, a substation as it were, and his violent attacks on union labor became greater and greater as the years went on. He did have a few union men as typographers in his plant, but he soon got into so much trouble on account of them that, being the despot that he was, he put them out. But that is another story. It only goes to show that the whole atmosphere of Los Angeles was polluted by Otis' almost maniacal fanaticism against organized labor, and the determination that Los Angeles was to be kept if possible a nonunion town.

But in spite of this there were unions, and in spite of this, as I say, the Debs influence that had been felt all over the country had been felt there, as there was a really strong

Field: socialist movement. A socialist mayor was one of the candidates just before the McNamara trial and it was pretty certain that he might win--Job Harriman.

Fry: I believe he was one of the McNamara's lawyers originally?

Field: Yes, he was. He had been one of his lawyers.

The public largely did not believe the McNamaras were guilty, at first.

Fry: Now what did you believe at first?

Field: I believed they weren't guilty too. I realized that sabotage had been resorted to by labor in the East and sometimes in the Middle West, but it did not seem that there was any evidence that they had been responsible for the Times' explosion. At first. And of course I think this might have continued if it hadn't been for one of the co-dynamiters, Ortie McManigal, who confessed, frightened by [William J.] Burns, the detective.

Fry: I couldn't find anything very much written on his confession.

Field: Well, the Journal, which had been very nice about my work--even sent me telegrams of approval--suddenly, after the confession, which came with shocking surprise and which was largely arranged by Lincoln Steffens when he found that there was a trail of guilt that would subject all these men to execution--When he found that out he came to Los Angeles and acted as a mediator between the McNamaras and Darrow and the [prosecution].

Darrow for the Defense

Darrow had never wanted to take this case. The fact that he wasn't very well, that he had word of news that Burns had been on the McNamara trail for months before this happened, and the fear that he had more to reveal than he, Darrow, could find out all conspired to make him at first refuse. But when he was convinced that the whole labor movement was involved in this and not just individual men, he who had been the great labor lawyer all his life, couldn't very well refuse to take this case, and he did.

The longest period of the case, as I remember it, was the selection of the jury. It was very difficult to get people who hadn't read much about it in the papers--all this seems to me

Field: idiotic anyway, that they can even expect to get jurors in any case that haven't read anything. Darrow was particularly anxious to get men in the jury who were favorable to unions, and would always select, as far as he went, a man who knew what labor was--what its long hours and its low pay in Los Angeles were, as against the high pay and shorter hours up here in San Francisco. So that he'd be challenged again and again by the other side, and that took a long time, as I remember it--several days, day after day.

 And during all this time Darrow began to get wind of the evidence that was against the McNamaras.

Fry: After he came to L.A.?

Field: After he came to L.A. He had no idea of it, and when they couldn't break Ortie McManigal down after he had confessed that he had been one of the dynamiters--

Fry: When who couldn't break him down?

Field: When none of the defense lawyers could break him down in his confession, yes. That and the fact that they found this long trail of dynamiting behind the McNamaras, who were picked up, by the way, not at the scene of the Times' explosion but in Indianapolis. When he found out all this he said to the McNamara boys, who were violently protesting having to confess any guilt, he said, "My God, you've left a trail a mile wide behind you." I remember his telling us that when he came up one night to see us, afterwards, before we went home. He was too good a lawyer to tell even us, who were his own friends, anything about the trial in any detail.

Fry: You didn't have an inkling of what was eating him, then?

Field: No, not at all, and I didn't know why Lincoln Steffens suddenly appeared in court. I had never met Lincoln Steffens before. But immediately one sensed the keen mind and the caustic wit and penetration of his mind, which I was later privileged to know so well.

 Well, all of this was too disturbing for Darrow to be willing to go on with the trial, and at the same time he had never had a labor trial in which he hadn't saved his man or men. I think he must have called Steffens in. I'm shady on that point. It's unclear to me whether he called him or Steffens decided on his own, because at that time Steffens was doing a great deal of writing for the magazines on everything that pertained to any kind of social movement, and he recognized

Field: that these men would be executed and he thought that the only way of saving them was to have them confess, and that a confession would give them life imprisonment and possibly no chance of getting out, and that Darrow had better convince them that this was the situation. Darrow had a very hard time with them. Steffens went in and he, I think, was the man that really convinced the McNamara boys that they must make this confession to save their lives.

Fry: Were you able to talk with Steffens any before that first day of the trial?

Field: Oh, no. They didn't talk. They wouldn't talk to anybody.

Fry: You know, some people write up Steffens as sort of a dreamer trying to apply the ideal of Christian love to a situation without taking cognizance of the political elements involved. Did Steffens seem like that to you at that time?

Field: Well, it seems to me he took very great cognizance of them in this case, because it would have been much worse if these men had been proven guilty and all these facts that Ortie had told came out. While, of course, either way it would have been a shock to labor at least they saved the men. They wouldn't have saved the reputation of union if they'd gone through with a regular trial and they'd been proved guilty, as they undoubtedly would have. They had too much evidence against them. I think that he [Steffens] felt that, weighing everything, it was not only morally or ethically right to do this, but it was also the sounder thing to do politically. He knew it wasn't a happy situation. He had no illusions about it.

I think that the persistent statement that one hears that Steffie--as we all called him--was a dreamer was a very poor sizing-up of his mentality and his character. He was an idealist, certainly. But he was an idealist toward whose ideals this country must steadily move and is to some extent moving.

Fry: Yes, he's been vindicated.

Field: He believed in the Golden Rule. Later he became convinced that Russia would have to pass through--for our sins of injustice, that the whole world would have to pass through a period of dictatorship in order to gain the ground of economic equality, just as America had to go through a sea of blood to gain political and social equality. And he thought that liberty was so strong in the human breast that once hunger (which has priority over everything else with people) had been satisfied the world over,

Field: then the struggle for freedom with economic equality would begin. I don't think that's dreaming.

Fry: No, but this sounds very familiar to me these days.

Field: Well, of course, we've come almost a half-century from that period, but always the men of vision are ahead of their time. My husband was way ahead of his time.

I think I ought to mention here that Darrow asked him [Colonel Wood] to come down and be a co-sharer in the trial, and he considered it a great deal. But he, after all, had a duty toward his law partners and they were violently opposed to his having any part in it. While he was a man of complete bravery when he felt that it was the occasion to be courageous at all costs, he felt that Darrow could handle it, with the excellent assistant lawyers he had, very well, and that he had no right to absolutely destroy his firm by going.

Also, I think he never wanted to work with Darrow. Darrow believed, you see, that the end justifies the means in law cases, and Erskine felt that was contrary to all the long process by which our present law had been set up. I think that my husband believed that Darrow had tried to bribe a juror, or if he hadn't really tried that he was capable of it, because he [Darrow] would say, "It isn't for me I'm doing this, it's for these men. I've got to save their lives." That's what he told me afterward. He said he would say to himself, "All this evidence is against them, and I didn't know it when I undertook the case, and now I must keep to my duty, I must save these men." He would argue that way, and feel that anything he resorted to--that the whole system was corrupt and if he fought corruption with corruption in behalf of a noble end that that was all right. At least that was the way my husband felt about Darrow. He was very fond of him and felt he was a brilliant lawyer, as he was, and shared his social views completely, but he did not ever stoop in all his legal life to anything that could be called a denial of the legal system, which he really revered. He felt it had been the noblest achievement of mankind through all the long ages, through the Roman period and before the Roman period and on. Anyway, he didn't go.

Fry: Well, I guess Darrow had these other two men, Le Compte Davis and Joseph Smith, to work with. Toward the end of all these pre-trial negotiations that Steffens was carrying on (with the help of [E. W.] Scripps, a newspaperman, apparently) there seemed to be a minimizing of the chances that the McNamara brothers would get away with a life sentence. It had begun with the idea

- Fry: that they would go completely free, with the ideal of Christian forgiveness.
- Field: That's true.
- Fry: And then you know they didn't. I was wondering if you had an inkling of how Darrow took this, because a term of life imprisonment was pretty far from--
- Field: Well, of course, there's where the M. and M. [Merchants and Manufacturers Association] betrayed their promise, and that's the one place, you might say, where Steffens was a dreamer. Or at least he was naive in that he believed these men, who had fought bitterly against labor and on whom there was a great deal of suspicion as to the means that they had used themselves to stamp out humanization. So I really think that probably at that one point, that one place, he was naive, and I think I would have been naive. He knew that it was a triumph for them, for the M. and M. and all those people opposed to labor to have these men proven guilty.
- Fry: The district attorney was [John D.] Fredericks. Do you remember him?
- Field: Yes, I remember him very well.
- Fry: Steffens seems to think that he may have been the weak link in this chain of negotiations that was going on. I think Harry Chandler [business manager of the Times] was supposed to talk to Fredericks.
- Field: I wish I had reread my copy of Steffie's [Lincoln Steffens] recollections on the McNamara trial, for I've forgotten whether he thought he was a weak link. I know he thought he was a dangerous enemy.
- Fry: Well, I don't know whether he was a weak link because he was the sort of man he was or whether it was because of the nature of these negotiations. You know person A would talk with person B and person B would carry it to person C, who would carry it to person D, and then they would send the answer back, and Fredericks was generally at one end of all this. How did Fredericks impress you?
- Field: He impressed me [as] all district attorneys do that I've seen since. I'd never seen any till that time; that perhaps made an impression that I never could shake again. He impressed me as one of these bloodhounds that are set on the trail and are determined to get their man at all costs. He had that almost

Field: personal and malicious element in him. There was nothing objective in his approach to this matter at all. I feel very sure that it was the impression I got then that has made me think of bloodhounds ever since [laughs] when I see district attorneys at work. I think you might add that that isn't a very objective point of view. They are necessary to the legal process and undoubtedly some of them have a thing that [inaudible] called a heart, but I never can feel it beating very hard!

Fry: After the trial was over, Sara, were you able to talk with Steffens to learn how he felt about it? Did he feel success or did he feel utter failure?

Field: Well, he couldn't feel that he'd been an utter failure, because their lives were saved, but I think it was a stunning blow to him to feel that the big businessmen with whom he had talked and who had promised him certain concessions forgot them as fast as they could and really belied all that they had promised. That hurt, and for years after when we'd speak of this trial he would say how far it pushed him into an examination of the whole evil system in which we were caught, with the big business and bankers and newspapers all lined up together. It was possible for men with that power of wealth and news value, so to speak, to make easy promises which they would know they could break. I think he says so. I think he says these were elements that helped form his feeling for the necessity of a complete revolution in our country, I mean a revolution in the social system.

The Trial, a Crash Course in Journalism

But before we discuss the end, let me tell you a thing that was both grim and amusing. I had been sending all my stories in with a slant for labor, and they had been warmly approved by the Oregon Journal up there, who found that they (and a great part of the people who cared anything about the trial at all) joined in the general opinion down south that these men had been kidnapped from Indianapolis and that they couldn't possibly be guilty, and there were some very grave legal aspects to that. Anyway, they had been perfectly satisfied with what I was writing, and I'd gotten a little bolder and a little bolder in some of my writings in the way of speaking of labor's handicaps as against the merchants and manufacturers, and they had printed it--they were supposed to be a liberal paper. Then suddenly, after the confession, I got a stern telegram from the editor of the Journal, and he said, "We want you to get an interview with Ortie MacManigal but remember he's a murderer."

Field: I had quite a little trouble getting an interview because the warden of course was like all the rest of them, so overwhelmed by the confession. He'd had Ortie MacManigal there all these months--you know they were in prison for months before the trial came off while they were investigating--and he seemed to know what kind of person I was and he felt, too, that he had to give me a stern lecture before he'd allow me to have an interview with him. He told me the same thing, he said, "These men are menaces to society and he's said all he has to say. Why do you want an interview with him?"

"Well," I said, "simply because my paper's ordered it, warden. I talked just as if I were an old hand at journalism, and I think he looked me up just to see that I'd never done anything before, so he finally let me in. I have among the clippings the article that I wrote on it.

Fry: This was right after MacManigal's confession? After that, did the paper require that you look upon all three as murderers?

Field: Oh, yes, they thought I should look upon all three as murderers. Then, the trial being over, they thought that my work was done and I came home, but I learned so much from that trial. It seemed to confirm all that Tom Johnson believed and felt and the people that I loved and respected in Cleveland, which was a really progressive city, and that I'd heard Debs say in his lectures. [So] I felt I wasn't being just impulsive in the views that were forming in my mind on the need of social changes and that I was backed by those souls who were indifferent to what it did to them to espouse these causes and [who] didn't care about making money. I learned a lot and felt more sure of my own ground and self from that time on, which is only told because I guess this is supposed to be some kind of autobiography. I don't like to leave the impression that I just read a book and then became a radical. Not at all.

Fry: Speaking of the autobiographical aspects, I wonder how you managed to catch on in a legal trial when you'd had no experience?

Field: Oh, that was interesting, and also very necessary. I should have said to you what you may possibly have assumed and which others would assume, that it was a trial of such dimensions, involving problems of such dimensions, that reporters came from all over the world, and it was a formidable lot. But I sat between two men in the courtroom, one was a youngish man named George West (who later became editor of our News and married a woman who was to become my close friend, Marie Welch); I ought to say he was most kind, shy and diffident, but he sensed that I didn't know anything about the trial and I could turn to him at any time. On

Field: the other side of me was a character indeed, I'm going to have to have you leave a blank for his name at the present, but he was down from the Examiner, the San Francisco Examiner.

Fry: Was he just a reporter?

Field: One of the veteran reporters, very fine, and he was a man that wrote all those witty things that are known, such as he wrote at the time of the earthquake, "They say the Lord destroyed this town because it was too frisky/Then why did He pull churches down/and leave Hotaling's whiskey?" It was a great time for Hotaling's whiskey, never shaken. He was a wit and I ought to be ashamed of myself but I can't remember his name [Charles Kellogg Field]. I enjoyed him very much but he wasn't so helpful. He thought it was a very amusing thing that a young thing like me (I looked younger than twenty-nine) should be down there doing this work on one of the greatest trials that ever had happened in that time in America. He thought that was funny, but George West took it very seriously and he helped me a lot. He told me where to go in the library to look up the meanings of terms and the general manner of court procedure in cases like this so I'd know them ahead of time and not be always surprised by what was being done, and I felt extremely grateful to him. It was very nice when the friendship was continued when later he married this young woman whom I so loved.

Fremont Older and the Trial

Fry: Let's see, would that be Fremont Older from the Examiner?

Field: Oh, no. Older wasn't from the Examiner. Older was a darling old liberal who was editor of a paper called the Bulletin. It later sold out to what is now called--what is it called? Our evening paper, the News-Bulletin?

He sold--he was getting old and he was tired and Hearst offered him an enormous sum. When we saw him after that (I'm speaking of some years later, but I might forget it), when my husband went into his office and just looked at him--he was so depressed that he would sell out to Hearst, because the paper was the one great arm of liberalism in the newspaper group--and he just looked at him and Older said, "Yes, yes, Erskine, I'm nothing but an old prostitute, I've sold myself to Hearst."

Fry: Well, he'd fought a lot of battles.

- Field: Oh, had he fought battles! He'd fought just one battle after another, and always on the liberal side. He deserved his rest, but we were sorry somebody didn't buy the paper who could pursue its policy.
- Fry: And we're still suffering for it.
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: While we're on the subject of Older, did he and your husband work together at all?
- Field: Well, not in actual work, because my husband didn't--but they sort of shared the same views, and when the Mooney case came up and Older was still then publishing the Bulletin, Erskine stood by him greatly in that. Older bought a ranch quite near to where we had gone in Los Gatos, [at] a place called Cupertino, which was only a little ways from Los Gatos. He was up in the hills of Cupertino near us, so we came to each other's houses a great deal and saw a lot of each other. He was one of our giants in journalism.
- Fry: Well, we'll have to talk about him sometime. I wanted to ask you about all these other reporters who were there, Sara. Did you meet any other interesting ones that you'd like to comment about?
- Field: Oh, I met a good many but it would be just touch and go. The ones that really became a part of my life were George West and Lincoln Steffens, and I grew to love Job Harriman very much, too. He was a beautiful character.
- Fry: Oh, tell us about him.
- Field: Well, there isn't much to tell, other than his devotion to the socialist ideal and cause, which he carried to the end. Los Angeles never again got to the place where it had been at that time, as Mr. Searing points out in his fine thesis.

Impact of the Confessions

- Fry: Well, what did Job Harriman feel about Darrow and Lincoln Steffens?
- Field: There was great division of opinion. Labor was so betrayed, in a sense. I don't mean that labor hadn't been forced to certain

Field: violence by the always-violent opposition of employers. I don't mean to say that labor didn't know that that had been done. But I think on the whole it was not for the use of violence, and they had believed so firmly that the men hadn't done it that they felt terribly betrayed and they somehow connected Darrow with the confession of guilt. I think some went so far as to say he tried to save his own hide, he tried to save himself from defeat by this. But that is not true; I know it very well. I never ceased to be a friend of Darrow's (though we differed in the end very much on the war), but labor always seemed to connect him somehow with the terrible humiliation that it had had.

Now, after years have gone by, and different men, like Carey McWilliams and others, have written on this whole episode and been able to weigh the situation, they see that the real instigator of it all was Harrison Gray Otis. His violence against the union was so great [that] it inevitably brought on a concentration of pro-labor leaders--I mean of labor leaders--It inevitably brought on a concentration of attack on him, until it took this final form. Of course, I think it can't be stated too often that these men never intended to kill anybody. It was a small charge of dynamite which they placed in an alley near the building--it wasn't in in the building. The pictures show how, though the building was shaken enough so that the glass was broken, all the rest shows the evidence of the fire that broke out because of the explosion, and that's what destroyed the building, really.

Fry: From the gas?

Field: Yes . And that is another kind of effect. The explosion from gas acts very differently from an explosion from dynamite.

Fry: At what point did you begin to doubt the innocence of the McNamara brothers?

Field: I never doubted it. We got no--we reporters who--

Fry: It was that morning in court, then, when it happened.

Field: It was just terrible to write about that. It was just awful. It was as if a sudden death had happened. The terrible silence, that awful sense of everything collapsing.

Fry: Did people have the idea that morning that Steffens might have been in on this, do you remember?

Field: Yes, I think they did. Of course, I think it must have begun to leak out, because he had so many meetings with the big businessmen,

Field: you know, and I feel very sure that all those meetings and attempts at solving this problem in the way that he suggested must have evaded secrecy. I don't think it could have been kept too quiet.

But anyway their confession was just like another bombing, in a way--I mean an inner bombing. Everybody was stunned and shaken. I asked one or two of the reporters--I remember there was one reporter, I can't remember his name because we only had a passing acquaintance, but as we went out the door I said to this reporter, whom I later found out was from the New York Times, "Did you have any inkling of this?"

Fry: Do you think it would have been any better if it had been leaked a little beforehand?

Field: Who could say, darling? I don't believe it would have been believed. I think it took an actual confession of the McNamaras themselves. Of course, Ortie MacManigal's confession had been a blow, but people had such confidence in Darrow; they felt sure he could puncture that testimony. But when point by point it was proved to be so, I suppose they began to be pretty disturbed and restless. I say they--I mean union people and the populace in general who stood by them, very amazingly, I suppose due to socialist influence.

Fry: You mean MacManigal was shady and despicable, is that what you mean?

Field: Yes. I didn't keep that, or else somebody borrowed it--
[rummaging around]

[break]

Field: [Apparently referring to the subject of conversation off the tape] They had a motley audience at the ten centuries' great court drama; and [writing] about people coming in, I'd say, "John M. Eshleman, the assemblyman from Berkeley, has also got the end of the team. He is the author of the first anti-race tract and the something amendment to the Constitution conferring great powers on the railroad companies. One would know from this just where he stands." [Laughs]

Fry: You had a very tolerant newspaper, didn't you?

Field: I certainly did. Of course, fortunately I was representing what was then the most liberal paper.

The State of Darrow's Health

Fry: I wanted to ask you a little more about Darrow. How did his health appear to you at this time when he would come up to visit you?

Field: It didn't seem good at all. The picture of him that's in that thesis [by Roger Cole Searing] must have been taken much earlier than the trial, for he was (though he didn't die for a good many years) never very well after that trial. He did summon up all his strength to try that murder case; you know, that famous murder case of the two boys who planned the murder of a little boy [the Loeb-Leopold case]. He got them off with a life sentence again, one died in prison, I think in a brawl with another prisoner, and the other one is now down in Puerto Rico doing very fine work. He was thoroughly psychoanalyzed, you know.

That was a very terrible case, though. Many of us felt very badly that Darrow was mixed up in it, but he was in financial difficulties for some reason or other and his law business had kind of gone to pieces because he took so many of these labor cases that he was in disfavor with his other clients [and] that lost him business. (You know the famous author of Spoon River Anthology, Edgar Lee Masters, was his partner at one time. He was a good lawyer, as well as an original poet.) He [Darrow] needed money very badly at the trial I spoke of. They just made a movie of it, "Compulsion," and that's where it was finally shown, I guess, by psychoanalysis to have been this compulsive desire to try to commit the most perfect crime that had ever been done.

Fry: Darrow seems to have had kind of a compulsion to always take the part of the underdog.

Field: Yes, he did, but I'm sorry to say in this case he knew that the whole public of the country was so shocked by that murder--all papers carried it very fully--that I think he would have been loath to have taken it if he hadn't been pretty much at the end of his financial resources and pretty much at the end of his physical strength. He tried that [the Loeb-Leopold case] with all his being, and of course his address at that trial is in his book; it's a classic. He was paid enormously; I think it made it possible for him to do what his health demanded, to retire, after that. I think he had one other murder case. A man had murdered his wife in Hawaii, quite a famous case. He found her with a Hawaiian lover. But that wasn't much of a case. [Inaudible]

Field: And after that he went to Europe with his wife, a little silly thing.

Fry: Oh, tell about his wife.

Field: Nothing much to say.

Fry: I saw her picture today for the first time.

Field: She was a dangly gangly little creature, with her earrings and her bracelets. I think he thought she was the very epitome of femininity. She was, I guess, but it isn't my epitome.

Fry: She wasn't really in all these things with Darrow, then, and shared them with him?

Field: Oh, no. She would think anything he did was just wonderful, you know, but she wouldn't have any intellectual connection with him in a matter and know what he was doing. She was really a plaything in his life.

Fry: Did Darrow have--

Field: There were many affairs with other women and they were almost always--it was quite curious that he had this kind of a wife, and he stuck to her. He never wanted to divorce her, but always his other love affairs were with intellectual women. He had a very low opinion of women in spite of his--That's one of the things that finally separated him and me. I remember when he stood outside--at the McNamara trial, he stood outside of one of the big buildings that was giving the returns on California suffrage--it came up that year--and every time it recorded a big no vote he would applaud. And I was so angry at him I could hardly stand it. But they won. And then I was happy.

Fry: Did you meet any other suffragists here in California at that time?

Field: No, I didn't. But later they sent up helpers, California sent up helpers to our Oregon campaign, which followed closely on the heels of this trial, and that I guess I have already told, but you put it in its right place.

Fry: I would like you to give your impressions of Darrow's health at the time of the trial. We've talked about it after the trial but not before.

Field: Oh, he was just devastated. His home was in Chicago, of course, where his law office was, and he was simply devastated and a broken

Field: man by the time he--

Fry: When he came up to your apartment, did he seem to be more melancholy on some evenings than he was on others?

Field: Yes. Looking back, I can see it was because the evidence was accumulating against them so. He was bearing this heavy burden, and he acted like a man that was bearing a heavy burden.

Fry: Was he very different from the Darrow you had known in Chicago?

Field: Not very different, in a way, it was just that some of his characteristics seemed to increase. He was a very melancholy man naturally. He loved Housman's poetry, which is always melancholy, and I think he was a natural pessimist. He had seen so much corruption, he had seen so much injustice. His heart was really with--as you said--the underdog and the downtrodden, and the path toward any kind of justice seemed to him so long. But it was always terribly emphasized, this tendency towards depression and melancholy, by the events of the McNamara trial.

Fry: Were you and Mary able to perk him up any?

Field: We tried to. Sometimes after a drink he'd seem a little lively, but on the whole he was in too deep, as it were in deep waters, to more than get his head up above them; he couldn't get up much further.

Fry: Did you meet the McNamara brothers?

Field: Oh, yes. I visited them in jail.

Fry: And you've written about them, I guess?

Field: Yes, I've written about them. I also wrote a sketch about the judge, I remember, that's here. He was a curious man. One couldn't penetrate his mask, but in those days really the so-called judicial group were all hand-in-glove with the M. and M., and of course the M. and M. had risen as a defensive organization against the growing unionization.

[end of interview]

XVII FACING THE FUTURE

[May 3, 1961]

Tuberculosis

Fry: Sara, what did you do when the Oregon campaign was over?

Field: My health had seriously failed under the campaign. It was very strenuous in every way. My assignment was to go to all the little unorganized towns. Mrs. Duniway and her co-workers had done a magnificent job, in the old days, of organizing part of the state, by which I mean there was a suffrage organization in a great many places, but I would find even those organizations defunct because many of the older women that had gone into it were dead or too old to do any work, and in a great number of towns there hadn't been any organizing at all. The conditions were often primitive and the food not at all attractive. I remember so often being hungry and going into a bakery shop and leaving almost as soon as I got in, because everything--flies had settled and were buzzing around. That is only a single illustration of the fact that there was very little comfort during this campaign. I wasn't looking for comfort. I was looking for a good statewide, solid organization, but after all the body isn't often as aware of what its responsibilities are as the mind is, and I was using my mind and forcing my body, which was really suffering from it. When I got back to Portland from the last trip I had to make (I had an office in the Selling Building--I went to my office in the Selling Building because I always had to return there for general supervision and conferences with the Portland workers.) And it was very shortly after our victory and the celebration of it that it became evident to me that I was coughing a great deal and that perhaps Colonel Wood had been right in the first place, that there was incipient TB.

Field:

So I went to the proper doctors and they found both lungs had been more or less infected. They thought that I must stop immediately and go down [south] to a sanitarium, but I must stop on the way in San Francisco to be reexamined by Dr. Moffitt, the great Dr. Moffitt. I hardly needed his confirmation, because my little daughter, who went with me, and I had to spend one night in San Francisco before my appointment, and that night to my astonishment I woke up with the blood from the hemorrhage coming out very freely and my one concern then was to conceal it from Katherine, my little daughter, who was sound asleep, and I had to move very quickly to get the bedclothes that had been bloodstained in such condition that she wouldn't be frightened.

Then I went to Dr. Moffitt, and of course, the suspicion was confirmed, more than a suspicion by this time, by him. I had a very good friend living in Los Angeles who had been a roommate of my sister's during her period at the University of Michigan. She had married a man who had TB and had had to be retired from the Navy, he had entered the Navy and had to be retired. Immediately on my arrival in Los Angeles, where the sanitariums for tuberculosis all were (or near), he said to me, "Now, I do not want you to go to Moravia--that is the place where you will just see them dying and in so bad a condition that there isn't any hope of their recovery, whereas I think that we have caught this in time. I can get you into a sanitarium just out of Pasadena that is only for nervous people, and you won't be running any risk of giving them any trouble, because you live in a separate little cottage.

My sister was still staying in Los Angeles, for what I now remember was the trial of Darrow for bribing a juror. I can't think at this period why it had been so delayed, but it was delayed, and my sister had stayed on for that trial at the request of her magazine. So she took my little daughter, who of course could not live at the sanitarium with me, and kept her in the apartment and brought her out to see me every few days. At that very beautiful sanitarium I soon began to at least get over the exhaustion that the campaign had caused, and being young (still in my late twenties), I suppose recovery was easier, but I certainly had to stay there a long time, I would say about six months.

Dr. Smith, who was the head of that sanitarium, consulted my friend (whose name was Dr. Earl Brown) and said, "I think this young woman's troubles are aggravated by her psychic condition. She seems to have some great weight on her mind." And Earl told him the whole story, and that I very much wanted to start divorce proceedings. He said, "Well, if she would live in the southern part of Nevada, where it's very dry and very warm

Field:

during the time of summer and spring and into the fall, I think she could make it. I think the fact that she would be starting a proceeding that would at least bring matters to some kind of conclusion would be as healthful for her as anything we can do for her here. She's been eating well here, since she got over the terrible exhaustion to which she'd been exposed--" And so I went to Goldfield, Nevada. Darrow had written me in answer to a letter of mine saying I didn't want to go to Reno because of the notoriety that all the divorcees get there, and also I wanted to go where I felt that there would be a judge that would be somewhat sympathetic to a situation that would be difficult for many judges to understand. He wrote me immediately and said that he had this friend in Goldfield and that that being the part of Nevada that the doctor wanted me to go to, he strongly advised my taking that advice.

The Children and the Divorce

Fry:

Sara, while you were in the sanitarium, did you come to any further decisions or conclusions about your life, when you had a lot of time to think?

Field:

Oh yes, indeed, and all the conclusions confirmed my knowledge that I could do more for the children, and really in the end for my then-husband, as well as to keep my own mental balance, by getting this divorce, and establishing myself near enough to where the children were so that I could see them constantly.

While I was at the sanitarium, I wrote a very earnest letter to my husband, saying that I was no longer in love with him, that it was due to no fault of his, [that] it was the fact that I was a child when I married and he was many years older, and also the fact that he hadn't changed in any of his ideas that were important to me in life, and I had, and my whole attitude toward the religion he served--or rather the form of religion he served--and my attitude toward social affairs, while in some measure agreeing with his went much farther, and that I was going to never return home.

Whereupon, he sent Albert down, and I don't know whether he gave him any instructions or not, because if so Albert was such a manly little fellow he didn't show any agitation at first, but after we had visited a while, he said, "Mother, when are you coming home? I miss you too much." And I said to him, "Darling, I'm going to tell you an enormous secret--" I could do this, by the way, because Albert had grown to just adore the

Field:

colonel--"I am not in love with your father, and it's very wrong to have a home where there isn't the special kind of love that should exist between married people. I love Colonel Wood very much, and when we can arrange all the many affairs we're going to have a life together." Well, with this he broke into tears and said that he didn't see how he could stand it if I didn't come back home, that he and his father weren't always so compatible, and I said, "Darling, you haven't let me tell you what I propose to do. When you're of age, I shall then go to court and ask to have the custody of both you and your sister. And the colonel will come and if he can't get his freedom we'll make a home anyway, and if he can, all the better, but you are not out of the picture for a moment. But this is a great secret between us, and I must trust you to keep it." I said, "I will write you, when I wish to write on private matters that we've [been] discussing, I'll write in care of your Aunt Mary in San Francisco, and you can write me there and she will forward the letters." I thought this was necessary for his morale, being in a kind of uncensored touch with me, and this he did and I did all the time that I was [inaudible] at the sanitarium, and when I went to Goldfield. He was so sympathetic when he understood it all, and this sympathy was a sympathy that required a sacrifice; it was a sacrificial sympathy, and he bore the years. He said to me at seventeen once when we were crossing on the ferryboat (and I had long since had my divorce and he had been coming more and more to see me and be with me, as Kay had), he said to me, with his arm flung over my shoulder, "Mother, I wouldn't have respected you if you hadn't done just what you did. My respect is for any woman that finds she doesn't love her husband and has the courage as you did to make the break." And I said, "Well, many women don't make it, darling, for the sake of the children. I made it, in a sense (though in the end it was to bring me great happiness)--I did it also with the rather austere happiness that you can get out of knowing I was doing the best thing in the end for you. I couldn't change the emotional situation. We don't order our emotions, they come to us because of changed circumstances, and that is [so in] this case."

Well, he had understood all through those years, and that was the last talk that we had. Next year, at eighteen, he was going to petition the court to come and live with us. He was killed in the October of '17, just before--when was the Armistice? 1918, October 1918. No, we went into the war in Woodrow Wilson's second term, and we were not in it the full time--it was only after the Lusitania was blown up. He was

Field: killed* just five days before the--?

Fry: Armistice?

Field: --and in his pocket was found tickets for the--he had just entered as a senior that fall in what was then the University High School, where he was president of his class and was dearly loved--and he had tickets in his pocket to take a girl to this senior dance. He had told me about the girl he was going to take. He said, "Mother, I've got the prettiest girl in the whole class, but I don't think of this just because she's pretty, because she's got some brains inside, too." And five days after his death she died of that dreadful flu--that awful epidemic that swept the country and took the young more than the old. That seems a strange coincidence.

Fry: I did want to ask you how Kay felt, or was she too young to have much feelings about this?

Field: I think the poor little thing was torn. She loved her father very much, and was more like him than she was like me. Of course, she could not comprehend the situation fully, and I think as I look back that her need was such, and her clinging to me was such, that it was wise for me to have taken her with me to Goldfield, though it meant of course that her first school year had to be started in an inferior school--the little town of Goldfield was dead.

It had been a great gold-mining town, as its name implies, and almost all the mines had been worked out. There was one big mine going, and I learned a great deal about mining when I was there and managed to pretty nearly support myself by writing about the town. I think even before ghost cities began to be of interest to the public, I wrote some of the first articles about this being a ghost city and how, slowly and slowly, all was going--banks, they were all closed but one and that was toppling, and no new houses were being built and the old ones were decaying, and indeed the only factor, you might say, in our lives that brought us any interest as far as the town went was the one gold mine that was working. We became acquainted with the manager and his wife, named Clapp, very nice people, and they let us go down into a mine several times and they explained the whole process of mining and refining the gold.

Fry: You were writing these articles for whom?

*Albert Ehrgott was killed October 20, 1918.

Field: The Portland Oregonian, at this time.

Fry: And that helped support you?

Field: Yes.

Fry: Did you go to any other ghost towns and write about them, or did you just write about Goldfield?

Field: I wrote only about Goldfield--no, I wrote about one other little town, a silver town near there, not Las Vegas--which had once been a very prosperous mining town. I will tell you the name of that later.

Hospitalization in Oregon

Fry: Something else I'd like to dub in is the--what you have said were your very crucial experiences while you were hospitalized in Oregon. What were you sent to the hospital for that time? This was right after you met the colonel and your friendship began to blossom out.

Field: Yes, it was. I went to the hospital for a very simple operation that's very frequently necessary after childbirth, but in those days, I think I did explain, they kept you in hospitals longer, even for an operation like that. The population, you see, was small and pressures were not anything like what they are today, nor was the understanding that it was better to get a patient up early and have her move around, though I will say within the second week at least they did have me doing that, but very carefully and infrequently, as if it had been a very serious operation. I think one reason that perhaps they kept me there as long as that was that I went into the hospital in a pretty depleted state. I was pretty worn out from the move from Cleveland to Portland, and then the resettling--we settled first in a parsonage and then bought a house way out in Rose City Park, and all that was rather exhausting.

So it ended up with the fact that the colonel and I were able to see each other during the time that I was in the hospital and were having some very grave and important talks about the future, and how it might shape up. So he very much wanted me to stay longer, and he suggested to my doctor that since I had been so tired when I came in perhaps it would be a good thing for me to stay a third week, and assured me that he--the colonel--was the benefactor of this, because of his

Field: desire to be able to have these consultations, that he take care of that third week. My husband took care of the others. So he did, and I'm glad to remember that hospitalization and everything that went with it was not what it is today. It was nothing like it is today. Why, I think if you paid six or seven dollars for a good room, it was considered a high price, as against \$32 now, for the last room that I had to be in, the other day and last year.

The Dilemma for Colonel Wood

Fry: Now when you and the colonel had your talks, do you want to go into what conclusions you came to, and did you resolve any--?

Field: It was definitely concluded that I ought to be away from the home as much as possible, since it was not a happy situation, and that I would try to get some work to do that was within my capacity and that would not be too wearing. We little knew that I was about to get into a job that was the most demanding on the health that I think I have ever taken. We also faced the fact that he was heavily in debt, that he wouldn't be able to leave his law practice, as he had hoped, to retire, until those debts were paid. He had bought land, always for its beauty, and it had never proved, during his time, to be anything but a taxpaying burden on him. Nobody bought it. Land was always being bought anywhere else than where he'd invested. He owed the banks a good deal, and also he did not feel he could retire until a commission would be due him--a very large commission on a railway grant that he had worked out for Lazard Frères--and [he] could leave his wife in comfort and ease and have something for his children.

Fry: And did you decide to wait until this could be done, then, to start your lives together?

Field: I don't think we went that far. I mean, we knew that was in the offing, but I think we agreed that we would just try to take things step by step, as we could, see each other as we could, and work toward the consummation of our lives and the day when my husband [Colonel Wood] could retire from the law and come to be with me permanently.

Fry: Did you get any inkling that your newspaper job was coming up when you were in the hospital? Your covering of the McNamara trial?

Field: No, I think I didn't. When I knew about it at all it was more than an inkling, I think it was a fact. I think Colonel Wood just went down and saw Mr. Jackson, who was the owner and manager of the paper, and just said to him that he knew me and that I was a good writer and that he thought it would be a good thing for the paper if they had someone doing the feature work on this trial that would attract broad attention and would be part of the history of Oregon labor.

[end of interview]

XVIII A NEW SETTING

[May 23, 1961]

A Dream

Field:

Chita, I had a dream last night which was a repeat dream of one I had many, many years ago, but which had been, to me, so beautiful that I had actually remembered it and thought about it quite a little during the years. However, I never expected to dream it again. But the other night, it came and this was what it was:

There was a boggy land with an attempted path intersection, through which a tiny, diminutive figure, which I felt rather than visualized or identified, was myself, pushing with immense difficulty through, because the mud kept clogging my shoes. It was dark, except for a faint, vaporous light which hung over the great bog like pale moonlight, lighting my eyes for a moment.

Every now and then, I saw a great disc of indescribable light in the far distance. It was from this disc that the darkness of the bog was relieved. The reason I say I saw it only from time to time was I had to keep my eyes on where my feet were next to be put. It seemed, this light, to come from the ground upright, like a mammoth coin poised on its outer edge. It hid all immensity behind it, like a curtain, but one felt if one penetrated it, a light of greater density would be revealed.

Standing before it in reflected glow were two figures. One was a noble, white-headed figure in a white robe, which I recognized as a summer lounging robe that my husband had liked to wear. The other was of a lad naked. He was dancing a slow Shivaistic dance, using arms and legs, as I had seen in the Shiva dance performed by great Indian celebrated dancers. There was in both a sense of expectancy, such as one feels awaiting the arrival of a loved one.

- Field: I continued pushing my way through what seemed an endless stretch of bog, heavily, heavily, in pain from the great effort it took. Then, far off still, quite suddenly, I saw the bog was surrounded by a wall my failing strength might not be able to surmount. Just as I was about to despair, I looked very hard at the far boundary of the wall and saw that in it was a gate. The gate was open. I knew that the two at the foot of the light were waiting for me.
- Fry: That almost makes too much sense, Sara. Only a poet could have a dream like that. [Laughter]
- Field: No, I think if you've been studying Indian philosophy as long as I have--
- Fry: That's what I mean. In the light of Eastern philosophy, it's so logical.
- Field: I didn't expect to ever--it's logical and yet it's not, you see. This light seemed to be like a great, immense--almost immeasurable in size, in circumference. But it seemed to be standing up in a mysterious way, as if it were almost a [inaudible] curtain, you know, or a strangely formed curtain that had to be lifted or penetrated in some way.
- Fry: Yes. Well, that would be light, nirvana. Or is that what you thought?
- Field: I hoped it was, though, in the Indian philosophy, you don't call it nirvana. Buddha's nirvana was a negation of everything. It was nothingness. In the philosophy to which I more or less adhere, called Vedanta, the experience of realization, which is pure consciousness, is full of light. It's called Sashedenanda. Sashedenanda means, as near as it can be translated, perfect consciousness, absolute consciousness, absolute love, and absolute joy. Those are the three, you might say, elements, though, of course, any description of the absolute, that which is in infinity and beyond our finite knowledge, is hard. But I like the fact that it's a positive belief.

Those who have experienced this absolute reality at moments--Eliot speaks of it in his "Four Quartets," "those who have stood on the point where time intersects eternity," or "infinity"--seem to lose their present consciousness so thoroughly for a while that it's with some effort they return. Always, though they can never explain exactly what they've been through, they come back as if from having encountered light. They come back glowing and full of happiness into this state of conscious time.

Fry: Yes, the crossing-over idea.

Field: Of course, Chita, when we come to the latter part of my life, in which I encountered this philosophy, which was also beginning to grip the mind of my husband before his death, I can tell you more about what these things stand for. They're not all Vedantic symbols, but the main one is [pauses].

Congressional Union Workers

Fry: Sara, you think you went to Nevada then, in 1914 for a campaign on suffrage?

Field: That is my present thought. We will later confirm the dates by papers that I have not been able to get at. But I think I went into the 1914 Nevada suffrage campaign. I would say that aside from whatever help I was able to give in that campaign, the most important thing that happened to me was my meeting with a person named Mabel Vernon, who had been sought out by what was then the Congressional Union from Washington.

The Congressional Union was a group of very energetic, mostly young women, though there were some very fine older and most distinguished women in it too, who were centering all their attention on the gaining of suffrage through a federal amendment to the Constitution, instead of doing just what I was doing there in Nevada and what I had done in Oregon, going on working it state by state to attain it. Mabel Vernon was one of these people who, had she been religious, would have been in the Salvation Army. She had that intense dedication to any cause in which she greatly believed and her feeling for the women of the country, who were voteless and some of whom might never get the vote if we went on state by state only, was really most appealing to me. She explained how none of their workers in the southern states, under the old method of state-by-state, had been able to get very far, but that if we got an amendment to the Constitution passed, that there were enough states that were civilized enough, let us say, or were aware enough of what democracy meant, to vote for women's suffrage. Also, there were enough politicians to know that the women's vote, the country over, might be a very great help to them, especially if it was known that they had helped to pass the amendment.

The great thing about meeting Mabel was that after hours and hours of discussion of the subject, I was convinced that it was the right way to work, and I made up my mind that from hence

Field: forward, if I was able to help at all in suffrage work, I would do it through the Congressional Union. So, it was not only, as I say, that I had spoken in some of the harder places in Nevada and that had been an experience of very great blessing to me. But the greatest thing of all was meeting her, associating with her very intimately, and finding her the kind of person she was and the kind of conviction she had about this federal amendment.

I promised her that wherever and whenever the time came, I would give them a lift. At the moment, I didn't see when that would happen. But, as a matter of fact, it came very soon afterwards--I would say a few months after I met her--because the Congressional Union, at the time I speak of, had split off from the national party and had become an independent group with a beautiful headquarters in the old Dolly Madison House. It had decided that it would send a representative out to the Panama-Pacific Fair and that they would have a booth there and that they would have great petitions ready. I mean, by great petitions, they'd had petitions specially made, very long rolls of paper with the statement of belief that the women of the country should be given the vote in the same way that the Negro had been given it, by federal amendment, and asking for the signatures of all voting women and all people like mayors and governors who visited the Fair, and they came in great number, to sign it.

Doris Stevens was the one that was appointed to come out. She was another the the extremely deeply dedicated people. She had really gone to Oberlin College to get a musical education. She loved music and was a very able pianist. But she'd abandoned everything, including the man that she loved, really, because he was going to be a minister and she didn't feel that she could live the life of a minister's wife, nor did he want her to go out on this mission of suffrage. So, she left a good deal to give to the Woman's Party, as it later was to become, and which always slips from my lips before the event had happened. [Laughter]

Fry: [Laughter] Congressional Union.

Field: She was very beautiful, I think one of the thirty most beautiful women in the whole suffrage that I have ever seen. Inez Milholland (of whom I'll have more to say later) probably had even more of the arresting beauty that made her headlines in the paper. But Doris also had her own charm and her own beauty and her own great ability.

I'm always amazed as I think back over the effectiveness of the work of the women in that group. It seems almost as if they gravitated--women of that type--gravitated to this cause because it appealed to both their reason and their loyalty to women and

Field: their desire to see the vote matter settled once and for all, so we could get on with the business of important subjects beyond it, too.

Life in San Francisco

Fry: Sara, may I interrupt here to ask you now if you were living in San Francisco at this time?

Field: Yes I was, definitely. I had a little flat, which was just the upper story of a queer, old house that had been brought around the Horn.

Fry: The entire house?

Field: Yes, the entire house. After it had been set up, the husband and wife who owned it had a quarrel and it was sliced right in two, so that one side of it had to be boarded up with a blank wall. There were none of the modern facilities for comfort in it. It had no furnace, such as they had in England when I visited it.

Fry: Oh, yes! You mean the coal grate?

Field: Yes, the coal grate. Of course, I had a range in the kitchen, which I had to use all the time in the winter in order to let the oven heat and give us all some sense of warmth in that part of it. But I was young and I could take a lot then.

Fry: Were the children with you?

Field: They were with me all vacations*and every weekend.

Fry: I see. Otherwise, they lived in Berkeley at this time?

Field: They lived in Berkeley. Their father had come down from Portland, and in the course of time, had become pastor of the Thousand Oaks Baptist Church in Berkeley. He had a housekeeper, and by the terms of the divorce he had been granted the oversight of the children during the week, with them coming to me weekends and vacations, as I have said.

So when Doris came, I had enough room because in those days, we weren't any of us very particular about the niceties of things. We were willing to sleep on a cot or anywhere. Doris liked being with me and it was a great pleasure to have her there some of the time. She wasn't there all the time, but she lived with me

*The court stipulated that the children would spend one-half of all vacations with their mother. Actually they spent less than half (K.C.).

Field: part of that time, and of course through her you can imagine how much I learned. I also helped her with the promotion of this booth of which I speak, and after the Fair began I was often in full charge of it while she had to go about other activities connected with the whole situation there, seeing important people, and so forth.

Fry: What else were you doing at this time? Anything?

Field: I was continuing to take care of my future husband's work.

Fry: Files?

Field: Files, yes.

Fry: We don't have that recorded yet.

Field: You see, my desire to be as independent as possible kept me doing anything and everything that came along that could bring a little money. I did some writing. But I also felt that when Charles Erskine Scott Wood wrote me about his great need for someone who had critical value to go through all of his life up till that time, while he was still very busy in legal work he thought important himself, and wouldn't I be willing to take a small salary from him and do this work? So I was free to work on it in my own hours and also to help in this booth matter [laughs] with Doris Stevens. I would sometimes, as I say, take whole days in which I'd have charge of the booth, but people didn't begin coming in too early in the morning and I would always make up that time by working later in the night on the notebooks.

I found that they were certainly in bad shape because many of the poems had been written in pencil, or the notes had been written in pencil, and everything he had put into them has proven to be of value. So, I did all this in my own way.

We found that people were not only willing to sign this petition, but eager to. We began getting thousands and thousands of them in no time at all and this continued all through the time at the Fair.

The Panama-Pacific Exposition

- Fry: Yes. Did you get a great many people from other countries there at your booth?
- Field: Well, of course, we liked to have them come and visit us and they were interested, but we didn't try to get their signatures because it was so strictly an American affair this time. But we certainly got visitors from all over the United States. It was undoubtedly the most beautiful fair San Francisco has ever put on. They were all artists who planned it and it was memorable beyond words. I can't tell you, obviously, but the people came maybe for two or three days would spend two or three weeks, so they could come back and come back and come back and see the different exhibitions.
- Fry: How did people come, mostly by train?
- Field: Oh, yes, mostly by train. Some came, that were near enough, in automobiles, but automobile travel across country was pretty rare in those days.
- Fry: [Laughter] They were waiting for you to blaze the way!
- Field: I didn't exactly blaze the way, but I'm sure that we were the first women to go alone. That will come. As the Fair was going to close—I think it was in December of the next year, because I'm now speaking of 1915. The Fair was in 1915.
- Fry: Yes. And you arrived in Washington in December of 1915.
- Field: Yes. You see, it was to celebrate the joining of the two continents by the Panama-Pacific Canal. I arrived in [Washington] December, 1916. The Fair went on for a whole year, didn't it?*
- Fry: I believe those books I have say that you arrived in 1915.
- Field: Well, I am a little confused on this. But it must have opened, then, very early, because I remember meeting several distinguished artists from the East in the summer.
- Fry: Oh, good! I wanted to ask you about that.
- Field: J. Alden Weir was one of them. He was also the head of the Institute for Arts and Sciences in New York and a beautiful

* The Panama Pacific International Exposition opened February 20, 1915, and closed December 4 of that year. Sara Bard Field left on her cross-country trip for woman suffrage in September of 1915.

Field: painter, poetic, one of the early impressionists. I also met Childe Hassam.

Fry: Oh, is that where you first met him?

Field: Yes, that's when I first met him. He had a beautiful exhibit there.

Fry: Wasn't he one of Erskine's favorites?

Field: Yes! And Erskine knew him already very well indeed. So, when Erskine came down to the Fair, we'd all have dinners together.

I can't remember the other artists that I met. They'll come to me in time.

Fry: I want to ask you what these artists, who were impressionists, thought of the paintings that were there from Europe, particularly the emerging expressionists of Paris--the bright colors?

Field: I think that they had to learn from them just as we, in later years, had to learn first from the cubists. The cubists were on exhibition even then. But we've had to learn later much about abstract art. There wasn't much of that displayed back then. The post-impressionists were in very great numbers there. I mean, their pictures, their exhibits were.

Fry: Did you hear what Hassam or Weir thought of this type of painting?

Field: Which type of painting?

Fry: The bold, bright colors of the Parisian painters, who were just approaching the--

Field: You mean like Gauguin?

Fry: I'm not sure just--

Field: He was really one of them. He was one of the post-impressionists. I think that there weren't so many. I don't know exactly what group you're speaking of, but the very bright colors seem to me to have come in with such men as Gauguin, who painted, of course, in the far Pacific islands where he could scarcely do anything but make them bright.

Fry: Mr. [Louis Bassi] Siegrist told of how taken aback, really, he and a little group of painters that he belonged to were when they saw their first European paintings at the Fair because

Fry: they used such a bright palette, as opposed to the rather dark, dank colors of the pre-impressionists, and the subdued tones; this influenced them very much. I was wondering--

Field: Oh! I'm surprised at that kind of statement because the post-impressionists did not have dark, dank colors. In fact, one of the great things that the impressionist school did was to bring the picture out of the dark backgrounds of even the old masters, whom they revered, and of those who had followed slavishly in the tracks of the old masters and were not great.

Well, take, for instance, my husband's teacher of drawing at West Point. That was back in the 1870s. He had this strong influence of what I call that black background in him. I remember Weir, who always talked as if he had a hot potato in his mouth, saying [mimics Weir], "Our great effort was to bring the old fellows out of the dark!"

The cubists were certainly using some bright colors, but they were, of course, more interested in geometry than they were in coloration.

Fry: Yes, shapes. Were the cubists exhibited at the Fair?

Field: Yes, they were. The cubist school came and went rather fast and it was followed, of course, at once by this abstract school, where the colors are indeed very bright. Helen Salz has loaned one to the University of California library. Just as you go in from that hall between the--

Fry: The place where you check out books?

Field: Yes. It hangs [there] and it just knocks you in the face with its bright colors.

Fry: Oh. Is that the red and black one called "Psyche"?

Field: That's the one. Well, there were not such pictures as that in my memory of the Fair and I certainly went a great many times to that beautiful, beautiful art museum there that we're trying now to repair.

Fry: Did Weir and Hassam think that they were interested in attempting Cubism?

Field: No, not at all. They were content. Hassam's colors were--someone said he worked in crushed opals. They were very beautiful.

Fry: This one on your living room wall is of great beauty. [Points to painting]

Field: Yes. That's "Storm in the Desert." I love that picture. The other two little ones are his. One's a nude and one's called "[Inaudible] Path," and I love it. It's all starlight. It's rare to attempt starlight. I've got them in a very dark place. They ought not to be hung there, but there's no other wall where I can put them. I could have put them over here [points] for the afternoon light, but the morning light is just as dark there.

Now, there is an awfully modern picture by Ariel Parkinson. [Points to picture] You can see the colors are anything but heavy.

Fry: Yes, it's pastel.

Field: It's called "Figures for a Dance," and you can almost see their shadows mirrored in the polished floor, the highly polished floor, but the colors are all rather subdued.

No, I don't find that my memory brings out any of these pictures that this man you talked of spoke as being too--maybe he found the post-impressionists too bright.

Fry: Well, I think that he was painting in the older tradition of using lots of browns and blacks in his palette, see? And this brought a new world of art to him.

Field: Oh, yes. I see, yes. I thought you meant that there were lots of modern painters who were painting in that and who were exhibiting there. I can't remember it if they were, except the old masters, of course. They had beautiful ones of my very favorite painter in the world, Rembrandt, and others like him.

Fry: Sara, did people in the lower income brackets go to the Fair very much?

Field: I wouldn't have any way of knowing what the statistics are on that, Chita dear. I think they would make an effort, if they were near enough, to come in the summer when they'd be taking their vacation anyway. But on the whole, as I remember the crowds, they looked pretty prosperous. Of course, the cost of living wasn't anything like what it is now. A dollar was a real dollar. People could stay at hotels cheaper and they could stay at boarding houses cheaper. I suppose even in that day there may have been some trailers, though that also seems to have been a later innovation.

Fry: Yes. I was wondering because there were so many more people then who had not yet reached the middle-class status than there are now.

- Field: Yes, but there were plenty of others, too. You see, you have the population of a whole country to deal with here. I haven't a doubt that there weren't too many of the working classes that could afford it because wages weren't what they are now. I think they could now, although I never can quite get to economics. The higher cost of living isn't making it any easier for the labor class, even if they're getting these huge wages. I know that I find it very hard to live on my income.
- Fry: Yes, and the escalator goes up at the same rate for wages and costs.
- Field: In some ways, the working class does seem to be more prosperous now. They all seem to have cars and to get more chance at leisure than they used to, certainly.
- Fry: Yes. Well, I was trying to contrast it with our modern fairs where we do see a great many very ordinary workers and laborers and so forth.

Well, what would you like to tell us about the booth and the kind of people who came there? Do you have any little anecdotes?

[end of interview]

XIX THE DEMANDS OF THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

[June 20, 1961]

Suffrage Booth, Panama-Pacific Exposition

Fry: Sara, today let's begin with the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 and what your booth on suffrage had to do with that.

Field: Our booth was there at the instigation of the Congressional Union, which it must always be remembered became the Women's Party in time of a rather strenuous and desperate need to emphasize the party. They chose to establish the booth because they knew that there would be just thousands and thousands of the Western voting women attending the beautiful fair. They established it in the Educational Building which in itself was a delightful building to pass through and see how far the world had progressed in every way. As we had it on one banner, "The world has progressed in most ways, but not yet in its recognition of women."

They sent out one of their most charming and able and dedicated members, Charlotte Anita Whitney, who like Alice Paul spared nobody including herself from any work she felt they ought to do. She had the booth charmingly decorated and very attractive and the great petition hung. As the names were put on it, it was put onto the main table in the booth and hung down with the other end well rolled up, showing the expectation we had from women of an enormous signing. The booth had of course to be publicized and to that effect we had many prominent people (both that were living out there and those that came to the convention and cared about woman suffrage) speak for us at the booth. The result was that it became one of the well-known and publicized portions of the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Meanwhile while the booth was there we didn't hesitate to have interviews where we could with prominent visitors. I remember I was sent to interview William

Field: Jennings Bryan.

Fry: That was right after the booth got started?

Field: Yes. We had been waiting for him to come to the booth but he didn't come near it and when I met him I saw why. He was very much opposed to the amendment and not only opposed but hostile to it so that I didn't linger very long with him. I saw he was not able to change his opinions, that he was very much centered on whatever was his particular political pet at the time, which I think was the hope of once more running for president. I remember at the last saying to him rather rudely I'm afraid, but he had been very discourteous to me, "If you're thinking of running again for president, Mr. Bryan, and you want the support of the women's vote you know that you won't get it, don't you?" He answered that he wasn't going to run for the Presidency (but every candidate tells you that before it's announced), and also that he didn't care whether he got the women's vote or not. So my first interview with a distinguished visitor wasn't done in too sunny a room, so to speak.

Fry: You know, the magazine the Suffragist reports that he accused you and the whole organization of getting your money from the Republicans.

Field: Oh, he did. That was why I was so disturbed by him. I said to him, "The corruption that's gone on in your party and the Republican Party hasn't seeped down to us yet." Altogether, I think Mr. Bryan's memory was of a rather tart young woman (I was young then) who wasn't impressed by his greatness.

Fry: You had other interesting visitors, didn't you, like Mrs. Chen Chi?

Field: Yes. I wasn't there the day Mrs. Chen Chi came, but I was told it was very charming. She gave the woman her blessing and she wasn't a naturalized American so she couldn't--

Fry: Oh, I see. She was the wife of the Commissioner General of China?

Field: Yes. I think she had never gotten citizenship and in those days you know women just weren't--there were very restricted laws on gaining citizenship from an Oriental country.

We had also other people out beside me. Frances Joliffe, she was always equal to talking with the great and near-great because she was a society girl and had this streak of real care

- Field: about women's place in the world in her, to add to a manner that the socially elite understood. We were very clever, or rather Doris Stevens was very clever, in assigning people to interviews with these important visiting guests who could adapt to them. I always teased her in after years about sending me to Mr. Bryan. I wondered how she thought I could ever adapt to him. But we also went to our own much-loved Senator Phelan; we had a delegation to him.
- Fry: That's the one when Edwin Markham asked to go along with you?
- Field: Yes, Edwin Markham asked to go along. He couldn't believe that it wouldn't be important for a poet of his renown not to give standing to a committee going to Senator Phelan on this matter. Senator Phelan was more or less in line with Wilson's philosophy of states' rights, but he was willing to listen to the logical idea that it would be still states' rights, with the exception maybe of a small minority who had to accept in other cases amendments to the Constitution and he promised us that he would do nothing to oppose it, which was something at that time. But we didn't get any affirmative answer from him.
- Fry: The account I read gave me the idea that he probably was most anxious about your campaigning against Democrats.
- Field: Yes. We could point out that that had not been done by the Western women voters. That campaign up to that time had all been done by Eastern women who had no vote, and I can't impress on you enough how much it meant for a man in politics to be talking to a voting woman, how much more it meant than to be talking to one without the vote. He was distressed about that and asked us, I remember, at the time if we out West intended to do that. I think Doris Stevens was with us at that time and she answered very firmly that we would do according to what the party did, that our allegiance was to the idea of the party in power and not to any individual, that we were grateful for the individuals who furthered the amendment and saw that this long, money-taking and strength-taking struggle must be brought to an end somehow, but that they must never think--I remember Doris saying seriously to him (and she was so beautiful that she could say anything seriously without offense), "Senator Phelan, you must not think that because you further the amendment that that necessarily will change our policy. We have to keep a straight line toward the amendment and the amendment will in the end either be confirmed or denied by the state in which you are also a citizen. If you want to influence California against giving this by an amendment you can, but please remember that you were helped

Field: to power by the women of California after they received their vote." They were a very earnest deputation. There was no flippancy in them.

The Politics of Woman Suffrage

Fry: This actually would have been easier for the Republicans to have complied with than the Democrats, wouldn't it, because the Democrats were harnessed with the South which would never have given in?

Field: Yes. It probably would, but the Republicans were just as adamant on the question of it being a states' rights matter as the Democrats were. There wasn't any great division of opinion among them. Indeed, as I went on deeper and deeper into the work of the Woman's Party I was forced to realize that in political life men are influenced only and solely by the hope of political backing, and that all the pleading and the urging and the brilliance of the delegations of Eastern women that had gone [before] had just evaporated because they were helpless; they couldn't deliver the votes. Being so convinced, I could not say to Senator Phelan, and neither could Doris, that we would promise never to go out against Democrats if they failed to give us the amendment in the next election, in fact, we would go out against them regardless of their personal support, because it was the party we wanted to defeat.

Fry: Did any of you ever entertain the idea that the Democrats as a whole party could never back the amendment because of the South?

Field: No, we never had any such idea at all because we felt that the number of voting states would be supplemented by enough of the northern states and the near-northern states to give us the three-quarters majority we needed after the amendment was passed.

Fry: I meant in Congress, the Democrats in Congress and also those who would draw up the platform, and I suppose this was mainly what you were concerned with, wasn't it?

Field: It was very definitely, all through the St. Louis convention. They had far more votes in the North and the population in the South isn't anything like what it is in the North, and at that time Negroes were shamelessly kept from the polls by poll taxes and even brutality, those kind of actions that today they're fighting with all their being and are perhaps winning. But

- Field: the Southern vote, while it was of course considerable, would never alone have carried a party into power and I think that the politicians were reckoning with the fact that they'd have trouble with the South. But we felt that that was not likely in relation to the suffrage amendment because there were too many adherents in the North.
- Fry: They were mainly a power to be reckoned with and which would always force compromises?
- Field: Yes, I know, but we in our humble way were pitting power against power, and not against or for personalities. As I think I have told you before, one of the greatest lessons I learned and I wish I had learned it earlier in life was that in working for a great cause you must leave self behind, you must leave sometimes even personal preferences and wishes and give your all to what you are working for, impersonally, because it seems the only way to gain what your objective is.
- Fry: I'm anxious to get to that 1916 election. We can record some of the sacrifice votes that you had to cast.
- Field: I think before we leave the subject of the booth I ought to speak of the fact that dear old Mrs. Duniway came all the way down to the fair and made one of the most important and thrilling of the speeches. Thrilling because back of her was a whole life of devotion, and her attitude, so different from so many in the East, of delight that the young people were getting into it. Now in the old party they made a good deal of the fact that we were all untried young people, and she, being the kind of woman that she was, said, "These are the people that will bring suffrage to the United States." I remember that, how cheered she was by all the women that were present in the audience and I feel that that was her last salute, as it were, to the cause she'd served for so many years. I see there were four hundred of us that went to see Senator Phelan and--
- Fry: Yours was the main speech, wasn't it?
- Field: Yes, it was the main speech and it was due to that speech that our friendship began, because he had been lecturing us quite a little on this going out against Democrats, and I said to him, "It didn't do any harm to your Democrats because those were not voting women that went out against them. They were the Eastern women that were doing that a great deal and women from the Congressional Union in Washington were not voters," and I said, "The test will come when the voting women get busy on that. I think if you had been denied the franchise and were

- Field: working for it you would find that this method of [working against] the party in power was right." And I reminded him of what President Wilson had said in all his campaign speeches before the 1912 election, "I do not wish the Presidency unless with it you give me a majority in House and Senate so that I may see the measures that I feel are necessary to forward our country passed."
- Fry: So you did have a clear-cut case here of a party in power?
- Field: Yes, and that's one reason that we worked against the Democrats. If the Republicans had been in power we would have done the same things.
- Fry: If you'd had a split Republican and Democratic Congress, or a Republican Congress with a Democratic President, it would have been more difficult.
- Field: Then we would have taken different tactics. We would have had the voting women who were Republicans come out probably to help those men in the Republican Party who believed in suffrage, and we would have sent Democratic women out to help Democrats, like Mr. Taggard, who was so offended. (The poor man never got over it.)
- We would have had them helping them, but this was a hard thing for all these men and women who had spoken for suffrage and felt they'd done their duty doing that, and who had voted for it in their own state when it came up. It was extremely hard for them to get our impersonal party attitude.
- Fry: To realize that you were going to vote against their party and against them?
- Field: That's it.
- Fry: Well, the women were beginning to behave as men voters already.
- Field: I object to that. I think we weren't acting as men voters, I think we were acting as people with their eyes open to the one way of freeing women politically. I don't think that's the way men act. They don't go out against other people just simply because of the parties in power. Take an illustration today: Nixon is very plainly sharpening his dagger to get after Kennedy, but that's simply because he wants the Republican Party to get back into power. We were indifferent to what party was in power except as they held the right to give us an amendment.

Fry: I was thinking more of pressure groups and how they function.

Field: Oh, yes. We didn't work in pressure groups; we worked on a principle. I don't mean that there aren't men in politics who work on principle but I think there are few men who would go against their political party for the sake of others.

Fry: We were talking about this business of how the women were relatively unified on this issue and I couldn't think of an issue since that had unified so many women and yet split the country apart--

Field: No. There are different bodies trying to unify women, for instance, on the question of resuming nuclear arms tests. This telephone call which I was engaged in when you came in was from Lucy Hancock, who's the head of the Friends Legislative Committee. She said practically that and wanted to do something to see if we can't get a more massive cohesion of women who do not believe in our resuming nuclear arms. There are now committees and all different groups working for it without cohesion, and she feels that with a more massive strength we could really accomplish something.

Fry: Do you think the booth at the Fair added a great deal to the cohesion of women voters?

Field: Oh, so much that I can hardly speak of it without possible exaggeration. Yes, because they heard the women from all the other states who didn't know about the Congressional Union, who cared or didn't care perhaps until they heard some of the wonderful and beautiful speeches made about the Eastern women. I think they got a new vision of something they could do with their vote outside of their own immediate state. The very number of signatures we got showed cohesion. They signed readily, there was no urging or begging. They just came up and wanted to sign.

We had, as I say, a good speaker there every day. Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont came out. You remember she was formerly a Vanderbilt and divorced Vanderbilt and married Oliver H. P. Belmont. She was extraordinarily influential. She'd gotten tired of society. She'd been a society queen of the East and got fed up on it and was giving practically all of her life and time to the enfranchisement of women. She financed a great deal of the pageantry that we had during the Fair and the booth itself, and sometimes she paid a speaker. She left the old-line people, the support of whose quarters (about \$600 a month) she had, I think, assumed always--the old-line suffragists.

- Field: She came over to us heart and soul. She was a woman of the most strange ability to grasp such a situation as holding the party in power responsible with clarity and fearlessness. I will look up if I can the file of the newspaper that under my guidance she and I edited during one of her visits here.
- Fry: This was the day when all of the suffrage women put out an issue of Fremont Older's paper in San Francisco? In September of 1915?
- Field: Yes. I think it must have been in 1915, you're right. I keep forgetting that I stayed over in the East into 1916 making many speeches everywhere.
- Fry: Before we leave this business of pageantry and so forth, you did have a great deal of pageantry going on regularly, didn't you, around the booth? Or didn't you?
- Field: No, not so much around the booth. We had a great deal of pageantry the night of the great convention, which was jammed. Frances Joliffe helped to organize that. She had a good sense of that kind of thing. I look back on it and think it must have been hard on her because it wasn't long after all this was over that she died of cancer, so I can't hold her too responsible for some of the things that troubled me at the time of the trip. She organized a very beautiful pageant with Miss Paul's supervision. Of course Miss Paul came out, and Mrs. Belmont poured her money into it almost unstintingly so that we could afford to have it beautiful. I don't mean she was the only one that gave. We were all giving down to the bone.
- Fry: The account of it in the Suffragist sounded really beautiful.
- Field: Well, it was. It was one of the most impressive affairs that happened on the whole fair grounds. I don't think any other group that I know of organized anything like such an exquisite pageant. Mrs. Belmont spoke that night and of course she was a person with a very great attraction for crowds. Then Frances [Joliffe] and I were to speak, and did speak, and Alice Paul (who never spoke; she always kept in the background) had Doris Stevens speak for the officers of the Congressional Union.
- Fry: Charlotte Anita Whitney was something pretty big in this.
- Field: She was very big in it. I am ashamed that I have not spoken more of her. She was related to one of the judges on the Supreme Court and had a very fine social status here, and people had extremely much reverence for her. She was always in good works. She never married. She had some money, not a great deal but she

Field: used it all for excellent purposes, and it was only later that she became a Communist. She was converted by a Communist woman up in Portland, of whom she grew very fond, and after that of course there was great dissension over her. (But I am jumping ahead, that was long afterward.) In all the plans for the booth and in the pursuance of the duties that accompanied it she was faithful to the limit, taking charge many days when others couldn't.

Alice Paul and Plans for the Suffrage Ride

Fry: I was a little bit amused at the plans on August 14th, just about a month before you were supposed to have left California on your rather wild ride to Washington. The Suffragist weekly came out with a statement that a delegation of California women would make this trip to Washington and that Miss Charlotte Anita Whitney would lead the California delegation. Obviously the plans were very nebulous and they didn't know quite how you would get to Washington. You were just going, that was all.

Field: Yes. At that time I think they were nebulous. In fact, I wasn't informed that I had been chosen to go and I wasn't informed how I was to go until a very few days before. I had very little time to prepare because that kind of a trip required a more or less different outfit than if you're going to go on a train. You have to have more warm clothes and such things, and as you say it was then nebulous, because Alice Paul just moved as favorable circumstances allowed. She took advantage of favorable circumstances and I think down deep in her heart she felt somebody would offer a car and that the most spectacular thing for suffrage would be this trip, which was quite unknown for women to do then alone with no man in the car. So when two Swedish ladies [Ingeborg Kindstedt and Maria Kindberg] from Providence, Rhode Island, who were ardent suffragists came forward and said, "We're buying an Oldsmobile here and we want to drive it back to Providence, our home, and we will take the envoys," she simply announced to me that that was the way I was to go.

If Miss Paul had been a general in the army she would have known exactly what her troops were to do and have had them do it without any flinching whatsoever. I don't mean that she was dictatorial, either. She had a way of just assuming this was what you wanted to do because it was good for the party. I think she was--she is still--one of the most remarkable characters, but she's lost something of her strange, almost eerie quality. She's grown stout now. When

Field:

I saw her a year ago this fall she'd grown quite stout--at the Women's Party headquarters that Mrs. Belmont gave us for life because she wanted us to carry on the struggle for equal rights in legislation for women. She gave us this very fine house in Washington, and Alice Paul presides there still. She must be now in her late fifties or early sixties but she seemed very alive, and the only thing I noticed was that everything about seemed stodgy compared to the years when it was alive and moving. Her goal was set as firmly as the North Star is set in the heavens, and like a good captain she guided toward that goal and we on the ship with her took her orders--not because she was dictatorial or belligerent in her way of doing it.

It's almost impossible to describe to you. You went into her office knowing you were going to refuse what she asked and you came out having said you'd do it. It was a quality in her that I suppose is what we all have to aim for eventually, as Erich Fromm said, of utter impersonality when there is a work greater than ourselves to be done, and a work greater than ourselves often requires much sacrifice and effort. She just took it for granted that we would do it. So she came and announced to me that they had found these women and that they would drive me across the continent. And I said, "But Alice, do you realize that automobiles have to be serviced? I hear that service stations across the country are very scarce, and you have to have a great deal of mechanical knowledge in case the car has some accident."

She said, "Oh, well, if that happens I'm sure some good man will come along that'll help you." The first thing I knew--I was feeling a little uneasy, because these women were strange and I knew that Frances Joliffe was going to cave in at the last. I just felt that that would happen, so that I did feel a little uneasy, but I could no more have refused to go--I said to her, "I'm starting a new book, Alice. I was going to stay home this fall to continue."

She said, "But now you're doing this work." That was her way of answering you. The book--what was the book? There was this great work to be done. I had proved myself able to win audiences and she just thought that ought to be used for this purpose and, all right, get back to your book later. She was a leader of uncompromising but also incomprehensible nature. She didn't spare herself, either. She never put herself in

Field: the foreground. I think that was one of the things that was so impressive with Alice. She could have been a wonderful speaker. She had taken a very high degree at Oxford*; she was most learned and she was winning, in a way. She was just a little bold when I first saw her but she had these deep, wondrous blue eyes that looked at you with a steady gaze that you couldn't evade. Could you see any answer to anything she asked you to do? Only once I couldn't do it, and that will come later.

But anyway I announced to my beloved Erskine up in Portland--no, he came down to the convention and [inaudible], the great artist, was out here, which made it nice for him too. Also he wanted to see the send-off, so he was there at that glittering and wonderful and packed convention, wildly enthusiastic. I was figuratively supposed to leave that night with these two women, so the whole crowd came out to see us go off in the car. It was extremely encouraging to leave with that kind of enthusiasm behind you and know they were going to follow you all the way, but I soon realized that I hadn't undertaken an easy job, because the roads were so poor and the markings were very bad so that our directions were constantly mixed up.

Fry: Where did you go that first night?

Field: Oh, we didn't start out till morning. It was too late then, you see. The meeting didn't close till late at night. I went home and went to sleep and early the next morning we started out.

The Women's Convention

Fry: Right here I want to insert something back where we were, in our discussion of the convention, and that was the day that you had charge of the convention. I think it was the second day at which they devoted all their discussion groups to suffrage progress in the states, and since you had had all this experience

* In England Alice Paul studied at the University of Birmingham and the London School of Economics. She was graduated from Swarthmore in 1905 and from the School of Philanthropy (later the School of Social Work, Columbia University) in 1906. She received her master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1907 and her Ph.D. in 1912.

Fry: working for states--

Field: Yes. I had all my statistics in hand then, which naturally faded in the forty or more years that have gone by. I was able to tell them of the work in both Oregon and Nevada. Also I spoke of how discouraged I knew the women in Michigan were. When I was living there the suffrage movement was not too vigorous, but I had joined the suffrage organization in Cleveland and found that they got so little help. Even such wonderful people as Tom Johnson, the mayor, and his cohorts felt that woman suffrage would put the single tax back a hundred years and they weren't anxious for it.

I had left Michigan suffragists in a very disheartened state. They thought they weren't making any headway at all; of course later on they went at it with more vigor but they were always defeated. I spoke of the difference between the attitude there in Michigan, where I had come from, and in Oregon, where constant agitation under Mrs. Duniway and her helpers had gone on. Also I said, "You felt a different atmosphere out West." I laid it to the fact that the spirit of the pioneer women was still remembered and the shared hardships with the men were remembered.

There were many quite ready to listen respectfully to an address and everywhere, in all the little towns where I went, if I couldn't get an audience in a hall in some small places I would get one of the women that was a member of the local group to take me out in an auto and go to a street corner and I'd just start talking. The men would gather around, eager and listening. Also in Nevada--there's a very fine account of the Nevada campaign in Inez Haynes Irwin's The Story of the Woman's Party, in which Mabel Vernon and Miss [Anne] Martin, who was the president of the Suffrage League there, went out to all the mining towns and found everybody eager to hear them. They knew they wouldn't get Reno. Reno was afraid the women would vote against the gambling houses and they made their money by those a good deal and had divorce suits and I think they felt that women would be in their way there. But in the mining towns and places where there was a tiny group of houses that represented the farms (cattle farms), they would come in as good numbers as the low population in Nevada allowed.

I remember saying that I felt that the East had grown so used to--I said it had its Puritan fathers and mothers (I remember that so well), but it's been too long forgotten what the Puritan mothers did in establishing a new land here, whereas out here it was fresher in the mind.

- Fry: Was this the first convention of the nationwide women's voting group?
- Field: Yes, the very first that had ever been held. They hadn't seen any reason. The Congressional Committee under the old-line suffragists, the national association for suffrage, had never emphasized the Western woman's vote as anything important then. It took Alice Paul's experience in London of the method of holding the party in power responsible to realize what the woman's vote would mean behind that movement. I don't remember any convention of women at all of the Western voting states. I remember the help that was given us from California, that was nice. They sent up Anita Whitney and one other woman to help us in our campaign in Oregon and they were very useful.
- Fry: But as far as organizing women voters, as I understood, it was the first attempt to do so, that convention at the fair in September.
- Field: The very first one. You and I could perhaps go together and look back into what was called the Bulletin in those days. I'm sure the Call-Bulletin, which bought it out, would have a file. It had many articles by different people in it who knew the statistics of all this that you're asking me. I only had them in relation to women voters of the West themselves, not in relation to any convention that had been held.
- Fry: Was your main purpose in holding this day on suffrage progress in the state to show further how important it was that you attack this as a national issue, to get a national amendment out of it rather than going at it state by state?
- Field: Yes, it was. It was one of the objects of my day, but also I had, as I say, at that time a very full list of statistics showing what the voting power of women in all those states would be. It was quite an amazing figure.
- Fry: When the convention was held you got to see a lot of suffragists all together. I wonder if you could either prove or disprove the popular image of the suffragist as a woman in either bloomers or men's pants standing on a street corner smoking a cigar.
- Field: Well, if that ever happened--I suppose it did or it wouldn't have been caricatured--I imagine it was among a very few and it was certainly very long before my time. It must have been way wayback before I was even in the world. I must say that I never saw a more beautiful and attractive group of women in my life than there were at that convention. Nobody could accuse them of being anything but in the latest styles and

Field: hairdos and all the other things that are supposed to be feminine. No, there wasn't a trace of that. There were women who by nature are a little more masculine so that element happened. Gail Laughlin, for instance, one of the excellent women lawyers in this town, always wore rather mannish suits but nothing so extreme that you would single her out, and it was the kind of thing that she found useful in her profession.

FryL This whole spirit of the convention, the power that the women came to feel in communicating with each other at a convention and realizing that they did have the vote and that this was something they could use, this was to be carried to the women of the East who had no power.

Field: Yes. There were enough women from the East out here who had seen that they might go on forever having deputations to the President and it would be in vain, realizing that one reason that it was in vain was their lack of voting power. They had grown discouraged, and I think one reason this convention was so alive and so animated was because even those women that came out from the East got a glimpse of what the Eastern women would feel. And it was true. When I'd get to the place where I spoke in New York, I can't tell you the number of women who came up to me to say, "I had just given up. I was too tired to go on anymore." This was just like a blood transfusion, an injection in the adrenal glands of the Eastern women so that they really were heartened, and when they presented me with a loving cup*which had been so touchingly inscribed, you feel it even on that--I think they used the words that they felt we'd come to their rescue.

Of course, intrepid spirits like Mrs. Catt and Anna Shaw (except that Anna Shaw was getting old and not able to do much), all those intrepid spirits would have kept on and would have had a certain following, but it's inevitable that when time after time after time you have made every effort in you to get something and get nothing but a rebuff and several times, that brings on inevitable ennui and nobody can realize what gratitude they seemed to feel. Of course I was only a symbol of that. I was one person but I had made the trip and that had been hard.

On the Road

Fry: You had a car--

*This loving cup has been presented to the Bancroft Library. (K.C.)

Field: It was very hard to leave my children for such a long time because while they lived with their father in Berkeley I never failed to see them on a long weekend and sometimes in between.* But they both understood what my mission was to be and were very brave in accepting the fact that I ought to go. Their father at this time was minister of the Thousand Oaks Baptist Church in Berkeley, and they lived in Berkeley where the Hillside School now stands, their own home having burned down in the Berkeley fire. Their father had a very excellent housekeeper, who loved those children dearly, so that their care was assured and with that much comfort in my heart I was able to undertake the journey.

The car had been purchased either by one or both of two Swedish women [Miss Kindberg and Miss Kindstedt] who lived in Providence, Rhode Island. I think one of them, and perhaps both of them, had been physiotherapists. I know Miss Kindberg had, and she was a gentle and rather self-effacing soul who knew a good deal about driving because she had had a car in Providence which she had gotten rid of and bought a new Oldsmobile. Miss Kindstedt claimed that she knew all about the mechanics of a machine so that she could take care of the car on my long and what was to be rugged journey. They neither of them could speak very plain English. They spoke with decided Swedish accents and hadn't had much formal education other than in their profession. Therefore Alice Paul had said to me before we left that it would be Frances Joliffe's and my duty to undertake all the speaking.

I little knew at the time that Frances Joliffe was going to be unable to face the journey. At Sacramento, to which place she did go for our first meeting, she said she was going back home. I was therefore left alone with these two utter strangers and in a painfully embarrassing position of always having to make speeches and meet the prominent people while they sat on the platform and I always spoke warmly of their contribution, [but] it evidently wasn't quite enough to soothe Miss Kindstedt's heart, because she complained bitterly that they were never given any real sense of being part of the various occasions. On that first, or rather the second, journey--

Fry: First you went to Sacramento?

Field: That's right. We went to Sacramento and from Sacramento we went to Reno.

Fry: In Sacramento Representative Charles F. Curry is the one who met you and gave you the greetings?

*We saw our mother only on weekends. (K.C.)

Field: Yes. Of course all those politicians have passed from the scene now, and on a rapid journey such as I made I can recall very few of the names of the mayors and the governors. We met everybody and I had no time to keep a journal because of our swift passage from place to place. After we left Reno, where we had a very fine meeting--I don't remember that Alice Paul came out.

Fry: I think she was to arrive the day after you left.

Field: I do remember Mabel Vernon being there and assuring me that one of the things that was to be settled was that she would always go ahead by train, the fastest conveyance then known, to the next place at which I was to arrive so that the meeting would be organized and the town ready to receive me.

I would like to say right here and now, before I continue with this journey, that I think sometimes she had by far the hardest job because it all had to be done so rapidly and so efficiently. She told me only the other day, a year ago this fall when I was East and saw her, that her health had never been the same after that trip, it had so exhausted her; although she was a young woman it had taken too much out of her. This is the sort of thing that the Woman's Party did to people because the pressures on it, for reasons of time and constant need to keep it before the public, made everyone have to work very hard, but usually for most of them only for short periods of time. But with Mabel it was a long three months of grueling experience, for sometimes she had a very hard time getting things in order for our coming. I really feel that Mabel deserves most of the honors of that whole trip.

Well, when we left Reno it was very cold and this was now in September, I think the middle of September, and that is the time when it begins to get cold in that part of the country. We lost our way. We traveled all night long without any sleep searching for signs or guidance on our way to Salt Lake City. In the early morning when the light was just breaking--late, as it does in winter days or the late fall days--we came upon a ranch. My memory was that it was called Ibapaw Ranch, evidently an Indian name. (I will look that up if I can sometime.) But it [the ranch] stands out as really keeping us from being too ill to get to Salt Lake City because the bitter cold of the night and the utter desolation of the whole country and the fear that we would not have enough gasoline to get to the next filling station was so great that we were agitated all the time and in a good deal of physical distress.

Fry: Could you close up your car completely in bad weather?

Field: No. Cars in those days were very drafty when closed up. I don't know why, whether they weren't put together properly or else the fumes would get too strong and we'd just have to open it for air.

Fry: Did you have any way of heating the cab of the car?

Field: No. They didn't have car heaters in that early day. That became a later luxury. But we did arrive at this Ibapaw Ranch and there they saw that we were in need of a good deal of protection for awhile and they were kindness itself. They built up a huge fire in their kitchen stove and gave us hot coffee. I haven't a doubt that it was abominable stuff, but it seemd to me the most wonderful drink I have ever had in my life, and they gave us, of course for a fee, a very excellent breakfast, and what was best of all they gave us a map.

It hadn't occurred to Alice Paul to start us out with a map how to get across the country, and you must remember that the Lincoln Highway had just really been halfway completed and [was] not at all in good shape for miles and miles and also without direction [signs]. Of course we always took the wrong fork in the road. This ranch proved a real boon and sent us on our way again later that morning, warmed and comforted that we really knew the direct way.

Fry: Were you still in Nevada?

Field: Yes, this was Nevada, going towards Salt Lake City. We seemed to have gotten to Salt Lake City on time. My memory is that we got there just on time because of this long delay of the missing of the road. I seem to recall that I was whisked immediately to the courthouse, which stands in a beautiful position that everyone who's been to Salt Lake City knows, right on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. It was flooded with afternoon sunlight and there was a wonderful panorama of the whole city, which I consider one of our most beautiful cities because it was laid out with such foresight as to broad roads and well-built buildings. That was an extremely successful meeting.

Fry: This was the first one that had been preorganized?

Field: Yes, preorganized by Mabel with her usual efficiency, and she had seen everybody that was able to be of any assistance to her or to us. My speech was received with a great deal of

Field: enthusiasm, because I emphasized the fact that this was one of the most important movements that had ever been made. I said when politicians go out to fight for their party they usually have their own careers in mind, too, but here is a party, or group, that has formed with no idea of any personal advantage to themselves at all but only the desire that we shall right this long-standing wrong of inequality of the women. They were really moved by it. I remember several of the fine Mormon women who came up to me with tears in their eyes and said, "I want you to know that all the Mormon women here are going to give you every support that can be given and we will stand by this in large numbers no matter what it takes." I had emphasized that it would take a good deal of heroism for them to vote against their party if it became necessary. I think one of the reasons that the Congressional Union was so strong in its direct action policy was that we never tried to conceal from the people that it wasn't an easy thing for them to do. We said to them, "It won't be easy for you. You'll have your husbands against you and maybe your sons, and you have to honor the fact that you have the vote and that this can now be used not just for the benefit of your party that you belong to, but it can be used in a wider sense so that all women may have a party and can vote." They were among the most stalwart of the women that I met on the whole occasion. I remember staying overnight with one of the Mormon women who came of a long line of distinguished Mormon women. Her name if I could say it would be well-known, I think. She took me at night for a walk around the Mormon temple in the moonlight. I found it very beautiful to see it in that light and to have her tell me as we walked the great square several times together about Mormonism.

I have wondered since, and thought if I was a student I would like to look into it, whether this [interest of Mormon women in suffrage] came from a sense of a long-held perhaps inferiority in the family where Mormonism had been practiced and there had been more than one wife, or whether it came from the idea of sharing then and there in the life of other wives that had been introduced into the house. Of course, when I was there [polygamy] had long been outlawed and was a thing of the past. She also told me about the extraordinary organizations that they had for the relief of their aged and their sick and their poor, and she added, "Of course, we haven't a great deal of poverty in this city," which seemed to me a little suburb of heaven here. Altogether, my stay in Salt Lake City was delightful and I think was profitable.

Fry: Was Frances Joliffe with you then?

Field: Oh, no. Frances had left in Sacramento. I didn't know then that she wasn't so strong, and I really felt that it was a sort of traitorship, [that] she didn't have the spirit of the party in her doing that, that she saw that she was going to have to travel with these Swedish women who bored her and that it would be also physically hard. She had been brought up in great luxury, and I think now with regret of the fact that I was a little too hard on her [for] leaving me alone, with this great project almost wholly in my hands so far as speaking went and general meeting of the important people. I didn't know that she was not strong; it was very shortly after we won the vote that she died of cancer. But whatever was her reason for leaving, it was covered up and there was a hush-hush on it so that it didn't get into the papers at all. Once or twice I was asked, "Where is Miss Joliffe?" Someone had read that we'd started out together. I would make some excuse, that she was taken ill or a member of the family was taken ill but that we weren't advertising that, and it didn't get into the general public's mind.

It was rather disastrous for us when I got into New York; I had a hard time convincing the hard-boiled women reporters there that I'd made the journey when they found a fraud had been put over on them. Joliffe joined us in Albany so as to ride into New York, as scheduled. The women reporters that had been in Albany (that were either always there or had come up from New York for this affair because it was all extremely public) discovered it, and they took the word back to New York. It could have had a wholly disastrous effect, except that it was some way carried off; I convinced the reporters that I had come across country and that these two Swedish women had bought their car, they saw the California license. We finally, I think, overcame what might have been much more harmful to us.

Fry: It was a little hard to believe, I guess, that you'd actually traveled all that distance.

Field: They [the suspicious reporters] had never been to California and they didn't know about our cool summers, and they were disturbed about my having a little traveling suit that had a fur collar. They said, "Who wears fur in the summer? You can't tell us that you left California with a fur collar." And I said, "You come out and visit us and you'll need a fur coat some summer evenings. We have beautiful days but California is cold at night."

Fry: When did you begin to really become frightened of Miss Kindstedt?

Field: I can't remember exactly the place. It must have been about

- Field: halfway across. Or it may have been soon after this Salt Lake City meeting. They were sort of overlooked, I'm sorry to say, in spite of my efforts. I was too good a reader of character not to know that especially Miss Kindstedt had to have recognition. Miss Kindberg was, as I said, a marvelous and retiring soul and glad enough to be able to render this service to a cause that you know all Scandinavian women had believed in for so long and written so radically on the whole subject of women. I think that she would never have stirred up any disturbance, but Miss Kindstedt could not bear not being more in the public eye, although they always took pictures of them. Whether they got them into the papers or not, I don't know.
- Fry: You went through Evanston and went on to Cheyenne, Wyoming.
- Field: Oh, yes.
- Fry: Mabel Vernon wrote that you hit your first storm, of rain and snow, on the way to Cheyenne.
- Field: Yes, we did. But by this time I think we were pretty inured to the changes of climate. We had brought warm clothes and one of the things I so admired about Miss Kindberg (and in a way Miss Kindstedt) was [that], being Scandinavian with all their memory of storms and snow, it never seemed to faze them. They never suggested that we try to change the schedule and wait for the storm to cease. We piled on right through them, never knowing where we might be held up by impassable snow. It was a trip of daring, that's what it was, on all parts. On my part, and I think somewhat on theirs, though they should have known better, living as they had in bitter climates. I'd been so long in California I'd forgotten how cold weather could be and how early snow could fall in the East and at high altitudes. I really was so absorbed in the work and there was so much responsibility put on me at the time, naturally, that I think it's a very good lesson in psychiatry to realize that I was rather oblivious of my own self, and the discomforts that were numerous, because I was keyed up to a high point of dedication. The show must go on, exactly.
- Fry: You must explain to me, what did you do to keep warm? Just sitting there in the car without moving--
- Field: Well, my dear Erskine had thought of that. He had traveled enough himself as an army officer in a cold country to know, and he had provided me with the most wonderful fur-lined bag to put my legs in in case of cold. And I had a good warm topcoat and warm gloves, and ever now and then (not too often

Field: because we had to make schedules) we would get out and warm [ourselves], stamp our feet and keep our circulation in motion. We didn't allow ourselves to just sit hours and hours in the car and freeze into icicles.

Fry: It's amazing you even kept the car going. '

Field: Yes. We had very great difficulty there, because we would break down in spite of it being a new car. Cars were not as perfectly made. They were made of better stuff but they weren't as perfectly made in regard to the parts all hanging together, or something that my non-mechanical mind doesn't understand. So we did have numerous anxieties about our getting to a place on time, but knowing that we had to do it also was a good thing. We would push on where I'm sure much more cautious people wouldn't have done it.

Fry: Do you mean that literally, that you had to push?

Field: [Amused] Yes, we had to push. I remember one snowbank that we got into where we all had to get out and push the car out of it and get it into gear again. But we made it, with the exception of one place where we were late. Not New York. We were on time in New York. It was Lincoln, Nebraska.

Fry: Your axle broke just before you went through Geneva on your way to Syracuse?

Field: Oh, yes. We had to put up a whole day there while that was being done.

Fry: I don't think that was mentioned in the Suffragist magazine.

Field: You have it down here somewhere.

Fry: Was it Topeka?

Field: Yes, it was Topeka where we were late because of a bad tire, and evidently the engine was in trouble [too]. We had to wait a long time to get those things fixed, so the meeting--as I remember, they waited for us a long time, and Mabel Vernon addressed them.

Fry: This was when she had to stand up and talk to them for quite a while?

Field: She was a wonderful speaker so it wasn't a loss to them.

Fry: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about Evanston or Cheyenne? My notes show that Senator Clark pledged his

- Fry: support in Wyoming, and then you went on from there to Denver. Do you remember Governor Kendrick in Wyoming? I think he met you on the steps of the capitol or somewhere.
- Field: In Cheyenne, Mabel Vernon writes of a first storm, rain and snow. That's where we got into trouble. "But Burton Sinclair represented it and Governor Kendrick greets them." [Evidently reading from notes.] As a matter of fact, I didn't find any of the mayors or the governors who were anything but friendly towards us. We decided to get their names. We didn't ask other men that were not politically prominent to sign, because we wanted it so much to be largely a voting women's petition, but we did ask the governors and the mayors and the others that were of vital significance. Now, after all these years, I cannot remember all the details. It was a very rapid trip. It wasn't as if we'd stayed any time. We'd have a meeting and the next morning we'd be off for the next place, so that without a journal (I'd be too tired at night when we dropped into bed to keep full notes) and without the full Suffragist issues that kept account of many of the details of our trip, I cannot say much more except that we made pretty good progress up to that Topeka place.
- Fry: Everything seemed to break loose in Kansas. You went through Colorado and you had quite a big blowout and parade in Denver. Do you remember that?
- Field: Oh, I remember the big parade in Denver, yes. The Denver women were a very enthusiastic group. I remember the one in Chicago where the mayor was just utterly for us with all his being, and he asked me if I'd speak again at his home, that his wife would like me to make a little talk there to special women that she knew who couldn't get out that day.
- Fry: I can just imagine you there on the Art Institute steps.
- Field: Something very significant occurred that day and I hope I can recall it for a later--
- Fry: Back to Denver: Mrs. Lucius Cuthbert and Bertha Fowler, do you remember any of those?
- Field: Oh, yes, I remember those very well.
- Fry: Do you remember anything else about Denver that you'd like to say?
- Field: No, I can't remember anything. It all has melted in the course of the years into one great--you might say as pieces of molasses

- Field: candy in the sun. I just remember it as one long, exhausting and difficult, but exciting and very rewarding--pageantry, you might say. Each place Mabel organized so beautifully that the reception was not just a mere formal one; we were always met with banners and warmth, and motorcades all the time. We had a very great many motorcades all the way across the country.
- Fry: The top of your car folded down so that you could have a real Fifth Avenue reception?
- Field: Exactly. And another thing, the car was covered with slogans so we were, you might say, a moving advertisement for the suffrage amendment.
- Fry: I imagine you converted several service men at service stations along your route.
- Field: I hope so. I know that Miss Kindberg and Miss Kindstedt, who were very foreign and formal, thought I was entirely too friendly with them [laughter] and that women traveling across the country shouldn't be so friendly with men. But I noticed that they [the men in the service stations] had our welfare in mind much more than many of the people that they [Miss Kindberg and Miss Kindstedt] thought were proper to me. They hurried whenever they could, when they knew that we were off schedule. They would do the work on the car as fast as it was possible to be done.

Another thing I remember, and these are the sort of by-issues not main issues, but I remember feeling how true it was that the more remote a settlement was, the more glad it was to see you. A stranger, you see, was a very welcome thing in a community, and when we'd come to little towns where there was a filling station and we'd get filled up with gas or something they would be so cordial. They'd come out with hot coffee or a warm something to drink and they'd beg us to stay a little while. When I explained to them with gratitude that we would love to do it but we were really on our way to such-and-such a place, they always understood it and would send us off with God speed. If my life has been blessed, as it has, with the inevitable sorrows that must come too, it is because I think I got so many "God bless yous" on that trip. [Laughter] I said to Alice Paul when we got there, "You know, I am a symbol and I want you to know that as a symbol the Women's Party has had more blessings heaped on it than I think it can possibly evade. I think it will always have to admit that it had a special blessing." And I think it already did, in having such wonderful women as Alice Paul was.

Field: I wish I knew the reason why Alice Paul and Lucy Burns split.

Fry: Oh, they did?

Field: They had formed a marvelous dual leadership in the first hard years of establishing the Congressional Union as an independent organization.

Fry: They were both of leadership caliber.

Field: They both had been in jail in England, you know, had gone to jail and gone on hunger strikes and all that together. What occurred--I imagine that my acquaintance with Alice was not such as would let me into knowing how much of the leadership she could delegate to another. I have an idea that that would always be hard for her. She was a sort of one-person leader. I avoid the use of "dictator," because, as I said, she didn't seem to have dictator tendencies, but she is absolutely relentless about never letting anything go that she once wants to do.

Fry: Did she make a large part of the decisions herself?

Field: I think she must have, and I think that Lucy Burns was equally capable in her own way and may have found that difficult. But things happened later on in relation to Alice and some of her most loyal workers that make me think that this must have been the key to the difficulty she had with some of them. My own connection with her--she was always rather strange. [Laughs] She was, I think, a little bit awed of me and why she was I never could make out, but she always approached me with almost an apology. I think she really felt I had rendered an almost impossible service in having to assume the whole responsibility of this trip which Frances and I were supposed to have shared. But I know that I would run into this obstinacy on her part every once in awhile.

She would say, "Now you're going to speak at such-and-such a place tomorrow afternoon."

"Oh, I've already been engaged to speak at a luncheon. I can 't get to the other place in time."

"Yes, you can. You can just cut your speech short at the luncheon and get right on to that meeting."

Those little passages have made me think that others who had bigger issues and were more important in the whole organization must have suffered under it. [She was] immovable

Field: and strange, because people would come in to see her determined that they wouldn't do a thing and they'd find themselves going out feeling of course they'd do it. She was a strange combination. She is yet.

She said to me, "Why don't you come back into the Women's Party?"

I said, "Because I told you, I stand where I did at the convention. I wanted to give its power to the cause of peace and you wouldn't do it, and I am now so immersed in that that I can't do both."

But after I got home I'd get announcements from her of things that were going to happen and would I give so much to this? [Laughs] She didn't give up easily.

[end of interview]

XX SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUFFRAGE TRIP

[March 22, 1962]

Cross-Country Encounters

Fry: Would you like to start and tell us just in general how you were received as you moved across the country?

Field: After a half century since I took this momentous trip across a country which was still lacking in adequate roads, it is not strange that I have forgotten many of the details which would have been interesting if I could remember them. But living as I do intensely in all that happens from day to day I feel that those details have been crowded out of my mind except in a few instances. I do want to say here that the general feeling of the trip, of the people I encountered, was one of enthusiasm in the West and of rather diminishing enthusiasm in the Midwest, not at all hostile as I had been told it would be in parts of Kansas, Kansas City and Topeka [brief background rattle here], but not overly optimistic that this could be done. The attitude seemed to be, "Oh, women never get together on anything. They would never go out against their own party if that party failed, being in power, to pass the constitutional amendment." And then again [feeling] heightening as we came into the eastern states. I would say that from Chicago on, it reached the heights of its enthusiasm, and in the actual Atlantic seaboard states it reached a pitch of almost touching [rattle] gratitude, that the Western women who were blessed with the vote would give a thought to these Eastern women who for so long had been sending petitions to the President only to be coldly received because they had no vote behind them to support their pleas, and the Presidents were all glad to evade so controversial a question. This was a memory that has lasted to this day. The so-called "enemy country" which I was told I would enter around in Kansas didn't prove to be very much an enemy at all. It proved to be, well, let me say willing to listen, gladly, and rather fascinated

Field: by the daring adventure of the whole movement--not my trip only, but I mean the idea of a group of women actually standing together for other women whom they would never see.

It was that kind of feeling that we're beginning to have, in this era of which I speak, for the hungry of the world; we're caring that seventy percent of the people on this planet go to bed hungry each night. It was something of that spirit that Eastern women particularly seemed to feel, that they always went away hungry so far as getting any satisfaction as to acquisition of the vote. Perhaps that general memory is better than any of the incidental memories of each city. We went too fast for that; it all seems to merge into these general impressions except in one or two instances.

Fry: When you got into Kansas and were approaching enemy territory, such as Missouri was supposed to be, did you get some pretty good publicity out of your mud-hole episode in Kansas? Why don't you tell us about that?

Field: Yes, that was a colorful event in retrospect but a pretty severe, trying one in actuality.

Fry: [Laughs] You don't think it was worth the publicity?

Field: No, I don't think it was worth the publicity--except for a very delightful editorial that William Allen White wrote about it later when we arrived in Emporia. Well, the roads between Hutchinson and Emporia were simply impossible, and what made them worse was a heavy rain, and somewhere, let's say halfway between, we got hopelessly stalled in the mud. We couldn't budge the car, just sank deeper and deeper. What to do? It was late at night, I think getting on into the middle of the night, and [a] very desolate, unpopulated section. I remembered that we had passed a large farm about two or three miles back and as both the ladies who were either driving or managing the car were unwilling to attempt any kind of walking in that rainy night in the mud, I said I would go back to that farm and see if I could get help.

I shall never forget that trip back. It seemed to me it was ten miles. I myself kept sinking into the mud; I didn't have boots, and the mud began to get up to my knees. I would have to keep moving over, criss-cross wise, to places where I could see a footing. By the time I reached the farm I was very deep in mud, my little traveling suit was absolutely unpresentable, but at that time I didn't notice it. All I noticed was that I had to wake these people in the middle of the night, to my regret, and tell them of our predicament. I of course offered to pay

Field: them if they could bring horses and a truck and get us out of our mudbath--I almost said bloodbath, it was almost that. He [the farmer] was utterly amazed, and when he heard how far back I had walked he was most kind, in a rough, peasant way. I don't think we [inaudible] of kindness in that, because it was a kindness that meant a sacrifice.

He brought out his horses; he had two fine heavy work-horses, and a truck, and as we drove back he asked me about this trip. It was hard to explain it to him, because he didn't know much about public movements of any kind, but he kept saying, "Well, you girls have guts," which pleased me very much indeed. Finally we got back to the car. With the help of his powerful horses and his own wise knowledge of how to handle muddy rows we did get the car out of the ruts and then he refused to let us pay him a cent. He said, "You have paid me"--or this was the general idea--"You have paid me by letting me see what some women can undertake." So we proceeded on to Emporia, after bidding him a really fond goodbye and expressing a gratitude almost too deep for words. We continued on to Emporia and arrived there as dawn was breaking.

Well, when I walked into the hotel there was consternation. Because of the mud on me. I can't tell you what a sight I was. By the time I got to the farmhouse it had gotten up to my waist, so that everything I had--and [I was] splashed, you see the rain was very heavy too. I had been soaked through. The mud had splashed up all over whatever I was wearing underneath--my suit blouse and all. So that I must have seemed like a sorry applicant for a room at the hotel. But an explanation and a good tip gave us a chance to get a room. I of course had to strip to the bone and put on whatever I could find in my little bag. We had sent our large bags on to Kansas City, so I had no other outside clothes but what I had on.

The next morning the hotel arranged to send my clothes immediately to a cleaner, but not before William Allen White, who had heard of our entry into Emporia, had come to see me. I had to see him in bed, with I hope enough proper covering, and he was both highly amused and extremely awed by the whole project. He acted like a dear old grandfather, a little amused and yet at the same time seeing the significance of what we were trying to do. I wish I had the editorial he wrote in his famous paper, the Emporia Gazette, but I was going too fast and had too little time to collect such things. My husband later regretted that very much indeed and so do I, simply because the clippings would have given a fuller record of the whole trip. I couldn't keep a journal; we went too fast, and I would be too tired on arrival at our destination where we were

- Field: to stay the night to write a word except back to my children, or sometimes to dash off a brief account for the Suffragist, the weekly paper published in Washington.
- Fry: Did William Allen White continue to give you support? He was a Kansas Republican--
- Field: Yes, he continued to give us support editorially; he did not go out to speak for us because that wasn't his field of work, but he did give us editorial support.
- Fry: I believe you said once that this friendship continued.
- Field: Indeed it did. It continued on into the 1916s--I mean all through the [1920] campaign for President, and the Democratic Party held their convention for that in San Francisco, so he stayed overnight one night with us. He brought several writers (whose names will come back to me later) to the house and we saw a great deal of him. From time to time, up to the very year of his death, we corresponded, in a desultory fashion.

He was one of the most warm and delightful and humorous men I ever met. He combined a deep sincerity with an acute sense of humor. He himself was a reformer in spirit; he wanted to reform the Republican Party itself and make it a more liberal wing of government. I think had he lived today he would have been very sad to see how more and more conservative it grew. He predicted just what would happen; he said, "Time marches on, and with it changes are bound to come and in the end our party will be weakened to a point of danger if we don't march on with the events, and the trend toward liberalism."

A Threat

- Fry: Somewhere along in here there might be another little event that stands out in your memory, although it wasn't directly connected with the campaign. I believe either Kindstedt or Kindberg at one time threatened your life--
- Field: Oh, I thought I had told about that.
- Fry: You told it to me a couple of times but I don't have it on tape.
- Field: I can't remember at what point it was on our journey that one of these Swedish ladies--I always get them now in my memory mixed

Field: up because they were both stout and very Nordic and stolid, but the one that drove the car [Miss Kindberg] was gentle and evidently very much afraid of her companion or of not doing as her companion wished her to do, and I think that one was Miss Kindstedt. At any rate, it was the one that did not drive the car who was always very belligerent through the whole trip. She was very efficient, too. She could do, for that time, the most remarkable thing, caring for the car. She could grease it and wash it in all its parts; she could take it apart, so to speak, and know about it. That was of course of inestimable value, because at times she would repair whatever was going wrong with the car, and you can imagine that in that long stretch across the country there were frequently times when we needed help and there was no service station, and her ability to repair the car was invaluable. But she was very hostile to me, and one day it came out.

Just where we were when it happened I don't know but it must have been fairly soon in the journey or perhaps in the Midwest. She suddenly turned on me and said that I was grabbing all the limelight, that while she and her companion sat on the platform every time, I always described them as driving the car at a time when women seldom would have undertaken such a journey and of being able to take care of the car, as if they were just, she said, menials. "You make all the speeches."

I tried to explain it to her, without emphasizing it too much, that they spoke pretty broken English and hadn't been prepared to know as much about the West as I did, and [that] all the power that we were trying to transfer to the rest of the country came from there, and that it was inevitable that I had to make the speeches, that they had lived in Boston all the time they had been in America and didn't know much about the country as a whole and its general feeling in regard to such movements as we were undertaking. But it didn't mollify her at all, and finally she said to me, "I'm going to kill you before we get to the end of this journey." She said it with a fierceness and with a look in her eye that was a little terrifying; otherwise I might have taken it as just a passive threat, as people say, "Well, I could kill you," you know, and not mean it at all. But when I later learned that she had come out of an insane asylum--or we shouldn't call it that; she'd been in a home for mental patients for a long time and had only been recently released, I realized I had been running a pretty serious risk.

Fry: Did you know about her mental-patient history on your trip?

Field: No. And of course dear Alice Paul, being so glad to find two

Field: women who would drive across country, who would buy a car in San Francisco (to which they had come because of the fair) and were going to drive back in the car, [when] she found they would take me along for nothing she asked no more questions. She had a way of--dedication, I think, a feeling that if you had to be a martyr, well, that's just wonderful for the cause, makes good publicity. She never seemed to hesitate to use people rather carelessly. There was no investigation of these women at all; they just seemed like good solid Swedish women who were buying a car and were driving back to the East coast, and that was enough for her.

Potential Martyrdom for the Cause

So of course I realized after that that when she sent women indiscriminately out to do picket work, and possibly be jailed for it, as they finally were, arrested and jailed for disturbing the peace, I realized she never investigated the health problem, as to whether they might die from the hunger strikes and the general conditions of what was then a very dreadful jail in which they were put, with prostitutes and drunks. That was why I refused to picket later on, because I had had this experience, and I had had tuberculosis, and mine was only an arrested case. I knew that it would break my husband's heart if I should expose myself to something that I wasn't really fitted to do, after this arduous trip. I only speak of this because I think Alice Paul herself would have been willing to lay down her life for this cause. Inez Milholland, the most beautiful woman in our whole movement, did lay down her life for it (though unknowingly--she didn't know that she had pernicious anemia), when she fell on stage in Los Angeles with her arm outward, saying, "Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?" and fell over in a faint. She never recovered. She was taken to the hospital, and though many pints of blood were given to her she died, and Alice Paul, who I'm sure mourned her in a way (in a cold way), made a great deal of it for the suffrage cause. You can see that that kind of almost fanatical devotion to the cause would have led her herself to do anything, even to the point of death, if she felt it was the right thing to do. You wanted to ask, why didn't she picket and go to jail? Well, she knew very well that as leader of the whole movement it might fall to pieces and I think that's the reason she didn't.

Fry: I thought she did go to jail.

Field: Perhaps she did toward the latter part--you see, after this my

- Field: own tragedy (that I will have to speak of later) happened, and I have forgotten some of the details.
- Fry: I wanted to ask you about Inez Milholland. Before she died, I ran across a little reference to her in Max Eastman. Did you know Max Eastman?
- Field: Oh, very well.
- Fry: He was in love with her. Apparently they were never married or anything.
- Field: Oh, no. Max Eastman was in love with so many women one couldn't keep track of his amours.
- Fry: This was the only one mentioned in the history books, so she would be flattered if she were alive today.
- Field: Well, anyone would be flattered if she had given him even a thought of love. She was a very independent woman, very unconventional, and I haven't a doubt that believing in free love as she did she might have had a love affair with him. But if she did it was short-lived and her eventual marriage was a very happy one. She married a foreigner. [Eugen Jan Boissevain, later the husband of Edna St. Vincent Millay.]
- Fry: Did you know Max Eastman at the time of your trip?
- Field: Well, largely through contributions to The Masses only. I had written a little for it; my husband had written a great deal. The very first "Heavenly Discourses" were published in The Masses. So when I arrived in New York, the whole old Masses force received me with great joy and were very favorable toward our movement, naturally.
- Fry: And the same gal who contributed so generously to your cause also was kind of supporting The Masses, I think--
- Field: No, I think Amos Pinchot at that time was largely supporting-- the brother of the great conservationist.
- Fry: I was thinking of Mrs. Belmont.
- Field: Oh, Mrs. Belmont was not ever a supporter of The Masses. If I said that before I was mistaken.
- Fry: No, you didn't; I read it somewhere.
- Field: It was a really radical paper, and while she would go as far as

- Field: wanting women to vote, which her psychiatrist would have discovered today was a very interesting projection of her own ego into all women--she was outraged at any kind of putting women into an inferior class.
- Fry: It wasn't Max Eastman; it was his editor John Reed on whom I have the reference about being in love with Inez Milholland.
- Field: Oh. Well, that again might easily have been a passing love affair.

Chicago

- Fry: Would you like to give any impressions of Chicago, when you got your big reception there? I think it was on the steps of the Art Institute, and Big Bill [William Hale] Thompson was the mayor.
- Field: Well, I only remember what seemed like the immensity of the crowd and the impossibility of my voice carrying outdoors to all of these people. This was in the day before the loud-speaker.
- Fry: We ought to bring that out, that in all these speeches you did not have the aid of a microphone.
- Field: Never. Never. I remember that, and I remember Bill Thompson. I was either too absorbed in woman suffrage or just too ignorant of his reputation, or perhaps the great crime wave hadn't really risen to its crest at the time, but I certainly felt he was the most genial host that one could have. He gave me a very fine introduction, he seemed simply overjoyed at the thought that sometime soon, or if not soon at least inevitably, the women of the nation would vote. I got nothing but a sense of warmth and friendship from him.

A few nights ago, when I heard Edward G. Robinson give the history of crime in American since 1920, and saw what a horrifying part he [Thompson] had played in it, really giving the gangsters the control of the city of Chicago, I felt a little worried about my impressions of him as being so pure and so friendly.

- Fry: Well, he must have had a few second thoughts about really letting women have the vote.

Field: Oh, he must have indeed, as Al Capone's power grew and [as] his [Thompson's] participation in one way or another in the whole set-up of crime increased, he certainly couldn't have wanted women (whose sense of morality may not be any greater than men's but certainly is usually more vocative) to have any say in government.

Fry: And this was one of the big cries of the antis, that if women got in they would throw out gambling and drinking and we would have Prohibition and all sorts of dreadful things like that would happen. So that if Big Bill Thompson knew about this he couldn't have been too enthusiastic. Do you remember the size of the crowds and their response in Chicago?

Field: Oh, I couldn't estimate, though there seemed to be a sea of people and of course I'm sure that many on the outskirts of the crowd couldn't hear a word. But a crowd attracts a crowd and they just would gather and gather until the streets were blocked. They had to stop traffic or reroute it for the time being around the art building, so that it was a memorable occasion in the sense of it being thoroughly successful from the point of view of crowds and friendly reception. There were always of course some people in the crowd that were antis and would make their protest very vocal, but nothing such as Susan B. Anthony knew, when rotten eggs were thrown at her and rotten cabbages. I would say looking back that already a certain preparation for the vote for women had been made in people's minds, that they were so much less violent in their opposition. The women were the worst opposers, the right-wing DAR and all associations of that kind were extremely anti and they sent their speakers right on my trail in the East. Of course, one of their tactics was to try to blemish the reputations of some of the women who were connected with the movement.

Fry: Did they attack you for that?

Field: Yes, they did. But Alice Paul paid no attention to such things. I must say that if people heard it they felt something in me (not because of any virtue in me but because I was so deeply and earnestly concerned with women's progress and welfare and the world's progress) that seemed to wipe out any of the evil suggestions that some of these antis would make.

Fry: You think the tactics of the antis really influenced people who were already pretty opposed to women's suffrage?

Field: Oh, yes. I think it just reassured them that we were all dubious characters.

Fry: You left Chicago and you went across Indianapolis and up to Detroit, your home town?

Field: Yes. Of course there were incidents all the way across that have been blurred more or less until I got to the East, where things are very vivid. But I think we ought to leave that to our next session.

[end of interview]



Photograph courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery

Campaigning by car.
1915



Photograph by ASUC Photography

XXI JOURNEY'S END AND AFTERMATH

[March 29, 1962]

Last Lap of the Journey

- Fry: Sara, where did you go from Chicago on your trip in 1915?
- Field: Well, very speedily and with so much activity in each place that I cannot remember much of the individuality of the meetings, I went to Indianapolis, Dayton, Ohio (Columbus, Ohio), and then to Detroit where I had been brought up. I was born in Cincinnati but I was taken as a baby to Detroit and brought up there and didn't leave it till I married my first husband. There we had an extremely memorable and colorful time; the papers had carried it heavily because I had lived there.
- Fry: Did they get in the angle "hometown girl makes good," or something like that?
- Field: Yes, they did, and the Detroit Free Press, particularly, gave a very favorable write-up. Some, you see, were still skeptical and found it a very good opportunity for humor and cartoons and all that kind of thing, but the Detroit Free Press took it seriously and felt that it was an extraordinarily interesting event to see the representatives of so many voting states.

I had there a strangely beautiful personal experience-- at once personal and impersonal, too, because it involves the acceptance of the unconventional by a man one wouldn't expect could do that. I feel as if it were almost a traitorous act that I can't remember his name, but he was a bishop of the Episcopal Church of Michigan, I think. He had been asked to take a leading part in the whole proceedings that were to take place in Detroit and he had hesitated,

Field: because he had heard rumors that Colonel Wood and I were planning to make our life together. He called and asked me to come and see him privately. He asked if this were true, these rumors. I said, "Not in the way that you've heard them, but the basic fact is that this grave and lonely man and I have found that we belong to one another, and since his wife is a Roman Catholic and will not give him a divorce, and I have won my divorce, we intend to take up our life together, Bishop, on the basis of the fact that we love each other with a very enduring love that's gone through many years of waiting and hardship." He was so convinced by my earnestness and by the integrity, you might say, of my life as I explained it that he did take part in the exercises and spoke very beautifully of my work and just mentioned in passing that I was one of those who were breaking the paths for a larger freedom in the world. I thought that was an extremely wonderful thing for a bishop of the Episcopal Church to do.

Then there was this great procession of forty cars, that was a great one in those days, I don't suppose that it would seem so now, and the mayor's speech on the steps of the city hall. And there was a very charming evening meeting at which they fired off skyrockets and other fireworks and I got the largest number of signatures approving--Michigan didn't have the vote for women, but I got four thousand very prominent men and women to sign the petition for it, [for] the federal amendment. I think [this was] the largest number of signatures I ever got in any one place--partly because I always had to hurry on so. I think if I could have stayed two or three days in some of the other large places I could have gotten a great many more. But the parchment scroll was becoming pretty formidable as it was. It was enormous, and we weren't worried now about the fact that we didn't have the big backing to show the President. We didn't have to linger to get more in each place in which we could have.

And then it was Cleveland and Buffalo and Syracuse, Utica, Albany, Hartford, Boston, Providence--all of which have run together very much as the waters of a stream running rapidly seem to do. I can't recall details of those cities. There are records of them in the Suffragist magazine, to a certain extent, and of course the summing up of the whole thing was really the visit to the President in Washington.

Fry: I'd like to interrupt and ask just one thing about your Boston visit, since this was more or less the home and headquarters of the anti-suffragists. Did you run into any uncomfortable opposition in Massachusetts?

Field: There was always opposition everywhere from the anti-suffragists, largely from the DAR kind of groups, very conservative groups, and in some places personal attacks on me. But whether it was because the movement was so powerful in its inevitable growth and procedure to finality, it seems to me that it never was a very great obstacle. I know there were attacks, I mean I know there was much opposition to the actual movement, but they were not large in numbers. They made more noise than their numbers would [indicate].

Fry: You mean in the form of heckling?

Field: Yes, they would come in and heckle and they would ask questions at the end when the meeting was thrown open for questions, they would ask very foolish questions. They were easily answered and the enthusiasm of the pros would silence them; there were loud calls all over the hall for silence if they'd heckle in the midst of a speech, or if they asked questions that were not of a sensible nature, they [the pros] would say, "Oh, sit down." [Laughs] They were extremely vocative, these suffragists were. Boston was, as I remember, a very enthusiastic city to speak in for such a question because it had always had an advanced group of women that had believed in suffrage, and this short-cut of getting it to the people of all the United States appealed to their Emersonian minds.

Providence was interesting because it was the birthplace of my mother, and there were people who had known her as a girl, and her sisters. There I met a good many of her cousins and relatives of one kind and another, pretty old but they were very alive and very favorable toward the movement for which I was working.

I think I ought to add on that last statement about Providence that it wasn't strange that the East, which had worked so long for suffrage against such heavy odds, and especially Providence, was so favorable to the amendment, because the Quakers have always been very forward-looking people, in leading women and giving them a place side by side with men in everything, and the city of Providence is very largely settled either by the descendants of, or the present, Quakers.

Fry: They put your car on a ship in Boston and shipped it down to New York. Was it on its last wheels?

Field: Yes, they did. They always wanted to see the car, I guess. It was always prominent in the processions, because it was by this time showing its long trip and it had signs all over it and it had, I believe, indications of cities where we had been. We had put stickers on it and it was a sight to see. [Laughs]

Field: I think they thought it was worth the expense of the freight to send it down to New York. The reason sophisticated old New York woke up and really gave us some attention was because they had had beautiful processions there before--and they had tried every kind of device for gaining it [suffrage for women] in the state of New York and had lost it so badly that they thought it was just done for, dead and buried, and there wouldn't be any resurrection of such an enthusiasm. But here was a new movement and a new spirit coming in from the West, and here was a new promise of support, not from impotent and non-voting women but from strong and voting women. This woke them up again and they took heart and really gave me, in the name of the work, a magnificent chance to be heard. I think many of them even followed me from there to Washington and came in with the group that went to the president.

Fry: Perhaps we should explain here that you did have this big parade with a hundred cars or more in it and that it was--was it a ticker-tape parade?

Field: No, it wasn't ticker tape. I think that ticker tape hadn't quite come into fashion then. That's a good while ago. And I doubt if I would have had one of those anyway, because as a person I wasn't celebrated or worthy of any such thing, so it might be that they would have given the movement ticker tape, but I don't think it was fashionable then.

The memory of the New York meeting is not an unmitigated pleasure, because the women reporters (antagonized by the fact that they discovered in Albany, when I met the governor there at his mansion, that Frances Joliffe had just arrived) were skeptical of whether I had really taken the trip across the country or not. They criticized the fur on the suit that I was wearing and said, "You wouldn't be wearing that if you'd started in September, because Septembers are so hot in New York." They were hostile, but I think before we got through they were fairly won over, as much as you can get those rather hardboiled women reporters to be won to anything that's idealistic.

Fry: In New York you had several publicity-getting events?

Field: Yes, yes. I don't know why the plans for permission for me to speak on the floor of the House in Washington were made in New York, except that the influence of Mrs. Belmont was very great and probably started the idea right there. It was never granted to me, but I had so many chances to meet large groups

Field: senators and representatives that it gave me heart anyway.

The Great Day Arrives

Well, then came the great day for which all this preliminary--from the time I had left San Francisco on through these many cities, these many parades, these many speeches, sometimes three times a day, and the many, many heartening people that had really been awakened by what they felt was this solidarity of women being expressed in a new way, unselfish dedication of their vote regardless of party to this one cause for women. All this I just remember now in a kind of continuous, you might say, neon-light burning, and if I have been scanting giving it details it isn't because there weren't colorful details; it is because they have all become as one.

Fry: And it all happened rather fast, too.

Field: Very fast. That's the understatement of the year, rather fast. It was very fast. We would hurry on from one date to another with just a one night's stay and not very much sleep often, get up very early in the morning to start the next day. I was young but you get very weary just the same. That is why, I think, among other reasons that it is all one tale now, with momentous results for the party, but not remembered in its individual towns.

Fry: You finally did arrive in Washington, by train?

Field: Let me see, I think we came on a boat with the car, so we could ride right in. It [the car] was on the same boat that we took into New York.

Fry: Frances Joliffe had joined you in Albany and gone to all these other towns and New York with you?

Field: Yes, to Hartford and Boston and New York. Strangely enough, I do not remember her speaking. I think she was so ashamed of herself (that she hadn't made the trip and that the reporters had expected it of her and had discovered that she didn't; it almost queered us for a time, especially in New York) that she became a little dumb under it and made a very brief speech, just largely expressing the main idea, and left the rest to me.

Field: Well, I have the record and remember it; it was a bitter cold day when we arrived in Washington, and Representative [Frank W.] Mondell [of Wyoming] was interviewed by Frances Joliffe and Utah's Senator [George] Sutherland was interviewed by me, and both of those men appeared on the Congress steps and introduced us. Then of course the big event was going in to the President. I think that was in the late afternoon or in the middle of the afternoon [December 6, 1915].

Fry: You first spoke from the Capitol steps?

Field: Yes.

Fry: And then you went inside?

Field: And then we went inside. I think this is the place to read you a few lines of a letter that I wrote about the whole trip, summing it up, and also [describing] going in to the president:

The cross-country trip meant waking up a nation to national suffrage. The ten days in Washington meant trying to convert a great government and a not too fearless party leader. The national awakening was in a sense accomplished. Never has any suffrage activity had the press at its feet. Locally and nationally this little gasoline flight across country and the message of loyalty to women which it bore has appeared in the papers in every form and in every guise, under all circumstances of what they call firm or sensational news. But converting a government and storming the conscience of a President who must be politic before he is just, that is another matter.

I am not prideful enough or sanguine enough to admit we have been successful in that; I only know we have made history, that we were given unprecedented hearings before House and Senate committees, before national Democratic and Republican committees, before everything and anything whose offices might be interpreted as related to suffrage. I know our visit had an effect on the President, who came prepared to make a speech which he finally never made. (He had given it out to the press.) And who, under our gentle insistence that all great men change their minds and my reminder that he had [changed his] in regard to preparedness, admittedly could and did change his mind and would consider doing so again on a federal amendment.

Field: He had come into the room looking stern and annoyed. Delegation after delegation of Eastern women had demanded audiences with him, and he had given a stereotyped address: "Ladies, you must seek this out of your states. I believe in this matter being settled by the states." But this time he made no efforts to [do] that, except to say he was a man who could change his mind. But he did refer to the fact, which made us all smile because he was really the party whip, that he had to always obey his Congress and that this must all be put into their hands eventually to be decided.

Fry: Would you give the date and the person to whom you wrote that letter?

Field: Yes. This was written on the 19th of December, 1915, to Emma Wold, who then lived in Portland.

Fry: [Laughs] And whom you called Thelma.

Field: Yes. She was Norwegian-born and Emma didn't suit her at all. She was very much spared under the name of Thelma which was a Norwegian name, and I had read that beautiful book called Thelma, and I just rechristened her myself and everybody began to do it too.

Well, I notice that [what] I do say also in this letter to her at least gives the reason for my inability to have given more color to this account. I say, "You scarcely can imagine what weight of responsibility was put upon me, not only throughout the whole journey from coast to coast, but especially during those ten days of mad activity in Washington. After we had come from the president and he had seemed to be more mellow, but still evasive, we all came back to the headquarters" (which was then in the famous Dolly Madison house, which I believe is gone, like so many of the wonderful landmarks of Washington which have been destroyed to make way for new buildings, and government buildings, of course), "and there we held an indignation meeting. We felt the president should have gone further."

I, with Frances Joliffe's help, had dramatically unrolled the great petition and I had reminded the President that this came from the voting women, or from voting men in states where women did not have the vote but who so approved of their getting it by way of the amendment, and it had impressed him. There was no doubt of that. We all agreed that it was an impressive meeting and an impressive gesture, but we didn't feel he'd loosened up enough.

Formation of the Woman's Party

- Field: So then and there there was a decision that we would have a convention later on in the year and we would form a party. Instead of just being a Congressional Union, which we'd been called, we would form an actual party, known as the Woman's Party, and it [its platform] consisted of standing for the amendment, particularly by the voting women--
- Fry: Do you think this had been in anyone's mind before?
- Field: Oh, I haven't a doubt that Alice Paul had dreamed of this. Anybody who'd worked in the English suffrage movement would get that idea of the need for women to be organized as a party. I don't know what they called themselves in England, I've forgotten now, but it was more or less on the idea of a party. Not that their government was of course entirely like ours, but still it had the two parties and it did have the idea of holding the party in power responsible, whether it was Labour or Tory. I think that she had suffered. She had gone to jail in England and she had suffered so much with the effort of the Englishwomen to get the vote that it had been deeply ingrained in her, what the power of the vote could do.
- Fry: As I remember you made a little speech about this after you came back from the president?
- Field: Oh, yes, I did. I think I said this demonstrated that we needed to draw our strength together. We couldn't leave it at loose ends with the petition, but it must be, you might say, encased in terms of a firmly organized group. So I was thinking along the same lines as Alice Paul but I realized that, with her usual tact, she'd been glad for it to come out through another channel. And then her instant support of it and movement to get it together was such that it made me think she'd been dreaming of it for a long time.
- Fry: Well, was this a formal convention of your women in Washington at this time?
- Field: At this time. We just decided then and there to call all suffragists who could possibly come to Denver. I think this was in December of 1915. I think we were to meet in Denver in either spring or summer, because it takes a while to organize a convention.
- Fry: Well, the convention itself was held in Chicago, I believe. You met in Denver to organize it.

- Field: I think that we did. I think that we met in Denver to organize it and then we went to Chicago [June 5-7, 1916].
- Fry: Oh, I know now. After your Chicago convention, in August you had a convention at the Hotel Antlers, Colorado Springs, to develop your policy for the presidential campaign.
- Field: Oh. We met in August; that would be after the formation of the Woman's Party in Chicago. I was at both these things, at the convention in Chicago, and then I was going to go back and stay home for awhile (I felt the need for a long rest) but then Alice Paul insisted that I come to Denver.

Colonel Wood and Suffrage

- Fry: Right after this big decision by the women in Chicago, the only other thing that I know about that happened in Washington was that Erskine came out and met some of the women. He came out to do something with the Supreme Court.
- Field: Yes, he did. He had a case in the Supreme Court and he came to one of the real big banquets that we had at the Dolly Madison house and met a large group of women, and he was overwhelmed. He said he didn't know there were such kinds of women born anymore, I mean in any great numbers. He became a great favorite with them all, and I think he spoke once or twice in meetings for us.
- Fry: He was impressed with their intelligence? You mentioned off-tape--
- Field: Oh, very deeply so. He was impressed with the fact that we could be so earnest and so dedicated and yet not dramatical about liberal views in general. We didn't so concentrate that we weren't all of us suffering from the war, which came on. Now when did we get into the war? That was a couple of years later. It was after we got into the war that he sort of deserted us; he couldn't bring himself to-- No, I'm wrong, he did bring himself to vote against Wilson; he campaigned for Wilson's first presidential campaign in Oregon and had been honored by Wilson as the man who had won a Republican state for him. He gave Erskine the opportunity to select anything he wanted in Oregon for himself. He had a friend or two that he got very fine provisions for, as post-masters and secretaries of--where they collect the taxes.
- Fry: That was in 1912. You're pretty sure that Erskine voted

Fry: Republican in 1916?

Field: I don't know what he did in that campaign. I know he spoke against Wilson in Portland, on the same night that I spoke against him at another meeting. He was terribly opposed to our getting into that first world war. He felt it was a trade war.

Fry: This was before we entered the war?

Field: No, I'm all wrong on this. He spoke for Wilson, because it was before the war, and he believed he kept us out of war. I was claiming (from that point of view because I knew that would make the greatest appeal to women) that it wasn't Wilson that kept us out of war, it was the people, the uprising of people against our entrance into it. If it would have been politically wise for Wilson's career to espouse the war he would have done it, and therefore the credit should go to the people, as always, and not just to Wilson. And he [Colonel Wood] was speaking for him, and later it was when Wilson got us into the war--

Fry: When he was in Washington, then, do you think that was right after your long ride across the country?

Field: I think it was.

Fry: Was this when he was suing for more just taxation on his legal fee for the railroad?

Field: No, that was years after, when we had gone to Europe and we were called back to New York and we had to give up many of our plans of going to Greece and Egypt. But I'm very mixed on dates.

The 1916 Presidential Campaign

Fry: Let's go on. In April of that year [1916], as a gesture from the women of the East the Suffrage Special train came from the East to the West and arrived in San Francisco. You made a speech to a large crowd in the San Francisco Civic Auditorium where you managed to get the audience to make a mass pledge to put suffrage before party. Could you add something to that?

Field: Well, only that I'm surprised that they really asked me to make a speech for that because some very prominent Eastern women had come out on that Suffrage Special and I remember that

- Field: they made speeches. I had entirely forgotten that I made a speech at that meeting.
- Fry: Is there anything of significance about the women of the East coming out here I may have missed, an important convention or something about that time?
- Field: No, there were no conventions that I remember. These women were just organized to come out (and they were prominent women) so that they could keep suffrage on the first page of the papers.
- Fry: Was this another one of Alice Paul's plans?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: Then that was in April, and of course in June I guess everybody went to Chicago, including the Progressives and the Republicans.
- Field: Yes. The Suffrage Special was sort of in preparation for that, because we naturally wanted to get as many Western women as possible represented. Where they could pay their own expenses that was fine, and where they couldn't and yet were women that would count a great deal in relations I think that we raised money to help them come out, so that we did have a good many representatives from Western women.
- Fry: Then the Democrats had their convention in St. Louis.
- Field: Yes, I remember going there, and there I had, I'm sad to say, my famous correspondence with the president. By this time, you see, I had made something of a reputation as a speaker. You wouldn't think from these hesitant interviews I'm giving you that I could speak then.
- Fry: You've been pretty eloquent about women's suffrage.
- Field: Not as I would like to be, simply because this phase of the suffrage movement required such rapid work on our part that I just remember the mass effect of it, much more than the detail, but as a matter of fact—
- Fry: Oh, when you got to the Democratic convention, what was this about your correspondence?
- Field: I went to St. Louis.
- Fry: Was the colonel with you at St. Louis?

Field: No, he still couldn't [be]; he didn't get away [from] the law till around 1918. He couldn't close up his law practice until this commission was paid him which he spent a lifetime earning. So he wasn't with me. But in St. Louis I wrote on my own; I don't think Alice Paul told me to--I had been asked by a number of senators and representatives if I would speak to them, and I always said, "If we win the amendment and [inaudible], I will think about it, but I don't think I will. I'm not a party power, a good party political speaker."

But I realized that I was in demand as a speaker, so I took a very bold step and I wrote* the president and I said to him, of course he was there in St. Louis, that if he would come out strongly for the amendment in the forming of their platform, I would go out and personally work for him. And I had a most intriguing reply directly proceed[ing] from him (it wasn't turned over to any secretary [but] dictated right by him), in which he said that he realized what the value of my help would mean to any person who would seek office but that I must remember that he was only a servant of his party and would have to do what his party told him to do--the same old story. As I say, he forced much legislation that he wanted through by his iron will and he could have done this, too, but it [his failure to do so] resulted in this rather famous correspondence. I think I wrote him again and what he replied to that I don't know.

Unfortunately those letters are all down in the Huntington Library. I don't think they yet have been taken care of. I think they're down in the basement, because they knew I had to hurry up when I moved from our home in Los Gatos to clear out the basement, and there were files and files of letters that I didn't dare to bring up to a small house with me, so I shipped them down with the understanding that I could come down some day and go over them, but I've never been able to do it.

Fry: When you were in Chicago and the Republican convention and the Progressive convention were also going on, around that same time in June--

Field: Oh, it was, and of course lots of people thought we were

* Mrs. Field sent a telegram to this effect to President Wilson on June 12, 1916. [Ed.]

Field: crazy to hold ours at such a crucial time, because here was Theodore Roosevelt threatening a third party and breaking away from the old-line Republicans. They thought we wouldn't have any attendance but we had a wonderful attendance at our meetings.

Dudley Field Malone, [who] was immigration commissioner at the time, a great friend of Wilson, had resigned summarily when the women were put in jail because he was so outraged, and he was there. Oh, that was a year later. But he came on and spoke to our convention. I have to be honest and say there were personal reasons in it; he was very much in love with Doris Stevens.

Fry: I can see that woman's suffrage did have some advantages over the male in male campaigning. [Laughs] How about what you did in working with the members of the Progressive Party and the Republican Party in Chicago during this time?

Field: Well, I interviewed a great many of the Democratic senators in St. Louis. I didn't do much of anything in [Chicago], I didn't want to go, for one thing; I felt that things were under way and I was pretty worn out. But Alice Paul wrote me one of her wonderful letters (you could no more say no to her!) and said, "We expect you there and we want you to do so-and-so in the way of talking to groups." I suppose that's what I did do and I also made speeches at one of the main meetings, but I don't think I was a very important factor there and I was there more to give it--well, to show my deep interest, which I had. I was a representative of Western women, and it wouldn't have been very nice, after going across the country and begging women to give up their party, [saying] that it was going to need sacrifice, if I hadn't shown up at a time when it [the campaign] was taking definite form, and hadn't gotten up to swear that I would, too. Although I'd been a Democrat, I said, all my life, I will not stand by a party that fails to do this crucial thing for women.

Fry: When you were at the Democratic convention did you finally conclude that the Democrats were not going to back you, after you interviewed a few of the senators?

Field: We were pretty persuaded that they wouldn't. I don't know whether it was from that time on we started to organize these groups who went out definitely against candidates to defeat them. That was an extremely hard thing for some of them to understand, because some of them had been suffrage supporters all their lives, in general, and they couldn't understand that we were trying to defeat the party because they had the power to give

Field: us the vote and hadn't done it. I think it was only after the war came on and Wilson had then, of course, a terrific opposition to his stand on the war (until the Lusitania was blown up), and he needed really deeply to get rid of this vexing question because of the way they went right on picketing the White House and asking how long we must wait for democracy, and so on.

I think he was so harassed by it that he finally did just what we knew he could do--he simply said, "Let's [inaudible]--" I think it must have been very hard for him, for he was a very obstinate man and self-willed. Really, in a way [he] went to his own defeat in Paris because of these qualities, because he didn't take enough experts with him to give him advice on questions that he felt he could take care of himself, and couldn't deal with the sly and long-experienced other diplomats that were there. Clemenceau particularly, the old Tiger of France; he was wily and outwitted Wilson all along the line.

Fry: I believe once you told me that the Republicans asked you to campaign for them?

Field: Yes, they did, but I just couldn't do that. I said, "We're not pro or anti, we just go out against candidates of the party that has been in power. If you get power and you promise to give us the vote we'll go out for you."

National Politics

Fry: Then this put you in one camp and Erskine in the other during the 1916 campaign.

Field: Yes. I think he then felt that the war was justified, that Britain would not be able to stand up without us, and he had a tremendous reverence for the British form of government. He felt that most of what we'd laid [down] in law came, of course, through the Romans into England and to us and that they had to be supported.

Fry: He felt that we should enter the war?

Field: Yes. And then he went right on defending the people who talked against it. Dr. Mary Equi, one of the strange characters up in Portland, went out on the street to protest the war and was arrested because of what she said, because it was a time of what they called "clear and present danger." She had to go

Field: to jail. She was a doctor. He didn't want to actually enter the case in an active way, but he went on the brief and he made the final argument before the appellate court down here. She'd been sent down to prison in San Quentin, because it was a federal case and they wanted her down here. So he made one of his most famous speeches about defending the Constitution even in times of clear and present danger, that those were the tests, and if they gave it up for that it made an entering wedge into the Constitution and the First Amendment and the Fifth Amendment. That speech has been printed even in the Congressional Record, after his death, I mean his argument was. At the time they had Alexander Meiklejohn talking on civil rights in time of war, and he said, "I ask permission to publish one of the great briefs that have been written on this subject. I refer to Charles Erskine Scott Wood." I think it came out in some little pamphlet that one of the organizations wanted to print--

Fry: Was it during the war or after the war that he turned anti-war-- or did he?

Field: Oh, I think that as the war went on--I think he was always anti-war, but he knew that we weren't going to abolish it from the face of the earth all at once and that, since we haven't learned how to settle disputes by [any other] method, we would just have to be sometimes willing to say that one side or the other in a war that did come (which you wished wouldn't) was right or wrong. At first he agreed we should keep out of it because he didn't realize how strong the kaiser's armies were, and when we saw the destruction--I mean they lost thousands and thousands of their young men in that war--

Fry: While we're on Erskine right at this point, I wanted to ask you, Sara, if he had in any way been able to give support to Oregon's rather progressive legislation, on popular election of senators and several other things which later on were followed by other states.

Field: It was called "the Oregon system." Erskine was one of the originators of it. He and a group of men that believed in the single tax up there--This was before my coming to Oregon at all, so I would have to look up the details in the Oregonian on that, but I know he often told me about how glad he was to see the corruption abolished through the direct election of senators instead of their appointment, because under that [system] the appointed offices were just a question of bribery and favoritism, and after that the people just chose their own senators. It spread all over the country. It was direct election of senators, and there was some other

- Field: very important legislation involved in it that I will try to think of.
- Fry: I should have asked you this when we were talking about your Washington D.C. experiences and those ten days after you arrived in December, 1915, which were quite packed. Did you lobby?
- Field: Yes, I did. My program was all arranged and it was a tight schedule. They had many big banquets held and celebrations, because it was a big thing for the Western women to have come to their aid. There were these appointments made for me ahead of time to see Senator This and Senator That and Congressman This and Congressman That, and like all these things I rushed through from one to another. They too have all melted together in one great big interview. And then there was this great mass meeting in the Belasco Theater on [December 12, 1915] the Sunday following our appointment with the President. There Maud Younger, who was a very prominent member of the National Labor Party, made a touching and a powerful address. I shall never forget it, because she'd always looked so frail and sick and yet she could speak with so much power. At that meeting we raised this large sum of money, more than five thousand dollars, towards the whole campaign.
- Fry: This meeting was attended largely by women?
- Field: Well, no, men had become curious by this time. There were a great many men there, but it was I would say three-quarters women. I remember that meeting very well, because there was a kind of subdued--excitement that was a mixture of fervor without [our] ever losing a sense of what I might call a rational balance. There was always the reason for this move that was being made. The desire, of course, was to dispel any idea that it was just an impulsive, temperamental outburst that would die down. Maud Younger of course came from the West too and she made that very plain.
- Fry: Did she become a good friend of yours?
- Field: Yes, she did. She came to live in Los Gatos later. She had cancer and she was pretty ill all the time she was there. I didn't see much of her but we were good friends, and bound together in two ways, through the Woman's Party and through the Labor Party.

[end of interview]

XXII CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THE PARTY IN POWER

[April 12, 1962]

The Woman's Party Convention, Chicago

- Field: I can give you a run-down of what happened in June 1916, if I've got the strength to. I'm tired already.
- Fry: Just give a quick recap of the three conventions--first the Woman's Party convention and then the Republican convention and then later, in St. Louis, the Democratic convention.
- Field: Well, Chita, you will remember that up to the time that we formed the Woman's Party in Chicago we had been known as the Congressional Union, and the main reason for our decision to call this convention and become a party was because we knew we would have more political influence as such, and henceforth we must work in what you might call pure politics--if politics are ever pure. So we called a convention on June 5, 1916 [at the Blackstone Theater in Chicago] and the formal opening began on June seventh. Alice Paul had asked me, for the sake I suppose of those who liked things to be done in a semi-religious atmosphere, to give an invocation, which I was ill-suited to do in the orthodox manner. I remember making a little speech to God as to what our need for forming this party was and our determination to see that equal rights should be actually achieved, because it was a part of justice, and God was part of justice.
- Fry: It sounds like it might have been an invocation to Democrats and Republicans as well.
- Field: Well, looking back, I tremble to think just how much of it was that and how much was an address to the deity, but this was said in no disrespect to the vast power which I believe is back of all struggle and all movement and all learning

Field: and beauty that there is in the world.

Now, we then became a party and we asked representatives of all the other existing political parties to appear before us and tell us what their attitudes were and give us a perspective of what they intended to do. The Republican representative that was sent was eloquent in the manner of that day, but vague. The Socialists and Progressives both approved of our seeking the federal amendment by political means. Dudley Field Malone appeared (whether by appointment or self-appointment) because he cared so much about winning the women's vote for the forthcoming election; he was there, and made a very eloquent plea that women would not forsake a man who had kept us out of war and who had proved to be the most forward-looking president we had had since Grover Cleveland. Even after all these years I remember his wonderful Irish eloquence with his sparkle of humor and his equal earnestness, but he was not approved by the Woman's Party. They didn't boo him or do anything of that unkind nature, but they showed their displeasure by very lukewarm applause. He hadn't actually come out against this, he just begged that we would be careful about taking a political stand absolutely against his party. He was by all means the most impressive speaker, even though we had those who supported us. They weren't too impressive, and we left feeling that only the Socialist representative could we absolutely trust when the test came and we had to actually go out and denounce members of the party. But of course we wouldn't have had to denounce the Socialists; they were a minority party and perhaps it was safe for them to stand by and hope for the women's vote.

Fry: There was a Socialist Workers' Party; do you remember anything about that? I know they didn't speak at the convention.

Field: I don't remember much about it, except that I think later on in the course of the years it was the Socialist Workers' Party who got me to speak for certain labor movements that I responded to. But I can't be sure. If they were the ones that published the then non-Communist Peoples' World, that was the Socialist Labor Party. I think it finally went Communist.

Fry: They were a very small, minority party at that time.

Field: They were, and still are. The Communist Party is a small minority. I think they endorsed Debs' principle fully and felt that any socialist movement would have to come through the labor party. So to that degree they represented, you might say, not a dictatorship of the proletariat but a progressive movement that they felt [it] was inevitable would come through the labor party. They didn't feel big business would be much

- Field: interested in socializing. [Laughs]
- Fry: This was in opposition to Debs, who wanted to convert everybody.
- Field: Yes. He was more general, and I never had the chance that I often longed to, to really have a long talk with him, though I supported him (as much as a nonvoting woman could, because I was living in Ohio then), and I supported him by tongue at least, when he ran for President and got that phenomenal vote of over three million people, I believe.
- Fry: At this time, the Congressional Union became a party, but it didn't arrive at a platform until a later meeting, a couple of months later.
- Field: No. There was a great deal of detail necessary to reorganize its actual name and character.
- Fry: And the other parties had not met yet?
- Field: No. The other parties had not met. And we couldn't very well decide on their policy until we were sure that the party in power was not going to stand by.
- Fry: So this was a political party formed not to run candidates but to support candidates who were put up by the other parties?
- Field: No, even that is wrong. We were never a pro party. We simply went out against the Democratic nominees for whatever office came up that year, aside from president. We sent women out into all the states, especially the voting states, to [urge a] vote against them on the ground that they had been in power and could have given us the vote and ended the whole matter, and let us go about our own individual party business. But we never advocated anybody.
- Fry: You didn't even stump for Progressives or Socialists, then?
- Field: We didn't stump for anybody, because we weren't a pro party. It was a very negative position, but it was a necessary one and one that the English women had adhered to faithfully. They had to be against the party in power. Of course the inference was that we would put aside our party affiliations for the time being and vote for any of these others, but that was only an assumption. Our campaign was based on being against these others [members of the party in power] because they had failed women.

The Democratic Convention, St. Louis

- Fry: Then you went down to St. Louis and visited the Democratic convention there, and that was where you sent your telegram to President Wilson, which we've already spoken of.
- Field: Of course, at the convention we naturally waited with great hope that perhaps the formation of our former Congressional Union into a political party that could act on political grounds and not just head delegations going to him, might have its influence on the platform. We had no illusions that the arguments we had brought forward would be considered, but we did have hopes that, being a political party, we would now have a kind of authority that only voting people do have, which had made us organize the western states for the very first convention that we had before we had to become a party. So we really, I think, waited with a good deal of hope for the announcement of the Democratic platform that was coming out of that St. Louis convention.
- Fry: The Republicans had already dashed your hopes because of their convention about a week earlier.
- Field: Absolutely. But they weren't the party in power and I presume that, as I said before--I can't say it often enough because it was the basis of our party policy--I presume that if women wouldn't vote for a Socialist candidate or a Progressive party candidate, they would be supposed to vote for a Republican simply because, well, it would be up to them individually what they did with their vote. It was what they weren't going to do with it that really was important to us, and that was that they were not going to vote for any party, any member of a party who had so much majority in House and Senate and a very vigorous president. They [the Democrats] could put over anything.
- Fry: The votes presumably were scattered around the other three parties?
- Field: We weren't interested in that. I never asked them. I never asked them, just because it was--
- Fry: Even among yourselves you had no special other party to invest your vote in?
- Field: Individually we did, though. But it was not planned. I suppose that sounds to you almost an unhappy state of affairs, to have so negative a policy, but it turned out it wasn't. It was a negative policy that proved positive, and I have to say it wasn't

Field: original with us. We were following the Pankhursts' manner of attack and that of other Englishwomen who had drawn long prison sentences for it and suffered hunger strikes and ill treatment.

As Inez Haynes Irwin relates,* we stood at the very door where the all-night sessions of the Democratic Party were held as they made out the last part of their platform. I understand there was some movement among the delegates to the Democratic Party who were on the platform committee to endorse our amendment, showing that the shadow of fear at least as to our power, what it could do, had begun to work. But it wasn't a deep enough shadow yet to really produce. And the next day we went away without knowing--the platform was kept secret; we didn't know that night, or in the early morning hours when we saw the members of the platform committee streaming out. They were mum. They refused to talk to reporters and certainly less to us, so we had to wait until the evening convention met to hear as a whole convention the platform that had been made that night, or ended that night.

Senator Cabot Lodge, the father of the present Henry Cabot Lodge, read the platform. He was a very elegant and impressive-looking man, absolutely groomed appearance, a beard--he was getting along in years and his beard was white and pointed. He looked formidable as he took the platform in hand and read it slowly, plank by plank. When he came to the suffrage amendment--he said, "We recommend extension of the franchise to the women of the country," and he stopped there and looked around with a malicious smile. Everyone noticed it. There was something of diabolical malice in it. It sounded so hopeful, and it ended: "by the states, upon the same terms as men." For a moment there was a stunned silence among the quite large crowd of Woman's Party members who were there, who had come to St. Louis to lobby, and then there were catcalls and boos, and "Shame! Shame! Shame!" rang out, so loudly he couldn't go on with the platform for some minutes. So the Democratic Party got a full dose of our displeasure, and they must have known that from that time on we were openly political enemies, with the party in power on one side, to be defeated, if possible, in the hope that the next party that came in would have learned its lessons and that we would really, without too much delay, get our suffrage amendment through.

* The Story of the Woman's Party (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1961), p. 160.

Field: This was a very great blow to us, though. We had hoped, indeed, that we would gain a footing in their platform that was firm and reasonable. They had, as I say, a good many in the party who, I understood, stood for it. But since they didn't [take this stand], we met again and decided that we would call a national Woman's Party convention in Colorado in August.

Between Conventions

Fry: In between those two conventions you must have gone back to your children in San Francisco.

Field: Yes, I certainly did. I went back to my little half-house up on the high hill and spent that month between that portion of June and the time that I had to go to Colorado Springs [August 10, 1916] as much as possible with them. I always had one or both of the children with me all summer long,* and when I had to go away, I had them taken care of adequately. This particular summer I think only Albert was with me, or perhaps I am wrong about that. He always worked summers. He would always find a good job; he was extremely enterprising and he had a nice approach to people. He was friendly and warm, and he got jobs without any trouble at all in those days when unemployment wasn't so severe. So he had a job, and I had a Chinese cook who came in and had his dinners ready for him when he came home at night. But of course that wasn't like my being there, and I was beginning to feel this very keenly. A sense of loyalty to my children and a sense of loyalty to my sex, as it were, which had embroiled me so, were beginning to clash a good deal.

Fry: Did you take either child with you to Colorado?

Field: No, I didn't. I don't remember why I shouldn't have. It would have been a fine thing to have had them in Colorado; the air is so good there. I imagine it was a matter of expense.

Fry: Since it was August they might have had a vacation with their father.

Field: Yes, I think that was the truth. I know that Albert and I were together a great deal in the summer of 1917, and so I think possible this was the summer that he--no, I think he [Reverend Ehr Gott] only took Katherine with him to Cincinnati to see his family there. Albert loved the little house, and he stayed there during my comings and goings and, as I say, the Chinese cook would have dinners for him. He had a fine job that summer with

*Only for half of our vacations. (K.C.)

- Field: a chemical factory, so he wouldn't be at home all day anyway.
- Fry: Were you doing anything productive for the world in those two months here? Do you remember? Between June 16 and August 10.
- Field: I was always writing poetry when I got a little leisure. I know I was writing poetry then, and of course one likes to have long uninterrupted periods (which were to come later when we got to The Cats). But I was young and I was creative, and even the comparative quiet, you might say, of the weeks in between my trips gave me an opportunity to write, so that when it came to the publication of my first book I had enough poems to be included in that volume.
- Fry: It seems some of your Pale Woman poems might have been written during this period?
- Field: They were. While in an account like this it's necessary to suppress the personal side of life as much as possible, because that portion of one's life that was connected with history ought to be impersonal, still I was going through very deep emotional strains and conflicts.
- Fry: Wasn't this at the time when Erskine was trying to get his divorce?
- Field: No. He had no hope of getting a divorce. His wife was a Catholic and would not give him a divorce, and he had no grounds on which to bring a divorce so, while he tried to persuade her again and again to be willing to do this, she said, "No, I'll never let my grandchildren think of me as a divorced woman," and that was final. But what he was necessitated to postpone our life together for was that he had a very large commission coming due around 1918; in order to do his duty and fulfill his obligations to his family, to leave his wife in not only comfort but extra comfort, luxury really, and to see that the sum that he was going to put in trust for her should be equally divided among his children [on her death]--in order to do that he had to go on with his law practice for a living.

So we only met occasionally, but we had long ago determined that if the law, or the lack of a legal sanction, still remained the truth of our love was too great to be denied and we decided that at all costs we would have a home together. He had waited so long to find someone who was a companion to him in every way, and I had waited. So we decided just to bravely face that out if it was necessary, in the hope that Mrs. Wood would eventually perhaps change her mind and get the divorce herself, or if not we would have been true to truth and not to some legal fiction.

Fry: You were in a waiting period but you did know that this would be terminated about 1918.

Field: Yes, we knew that pretty thoroughly.

Woman's Party Conference, Colorado Springs

Field: At the party conference at Colorado Springs we [the Woman's Party] shaped our policy, which as I say had to be a negative policy. There were a number of very important seats coming up for senators and congressmen in the Democratic Party as well as, of course, the reelection of President Wilson. We outlined how it would be done, what states we would center on--because we didn't have, of course, enough speakers who could go into every single one of the forty-eight states, [as] it was then, of the Union. We decided that we'd more or less concentrate on the Western women, where it would count, because if we went into the Eastern states, what could they do about it? They could just be glad that we were going to take that policy, but they couldn't vote. So we concentrated our forces--I think Alice Paul, who was just a master at all kinds of organizational work, did all the details, with some advice, as to who should go where. I remember receiving my assignments there [at Colorado Springs] so that I could prepare for them, because none of us were going to go out till the election time neared. We felt that would be the strategic date to do it.

Fry: And at that time you drew up a sort of resolution of your own, I remember. Did you make a speech to the convention or anything we might refer to?

Field: Yes, I think I made one of the main speeches at that convention but I can't remember its details. I made so many speeches in the course of that year that they all run together like molasses candy. I hope they weren't quite as nauseating as that, but that's the way it affects me now, as one mass of speaking.

Fry: So the army was formed, and as Mrs. Irwin says,* "the members... were all generals," and you went out to engage in battle with the Democrats.

Field: Yes, we did, and it was some engagement, because of course the policy that we adopted was new in this country. I think we were the first party, certainly the first group, ever to, you might say, use the idea of holding the party in power responsible

* Op. cit., p. 175.

Field: and some of the Democrats we went out against had been for us. But we had to be absolutely without any feeling about that because it was party politics that we were assailing, and some of the Democrats' feelings were hurt bitterly and deeply. I feel very sorry about that because I know one or two that just never did get over it.

Anti-Wilson Campaigning

Fry: Were those any California people?

Field: I think that if there had been California candidates up that year they would have kept me right here, but the fact that they sent me away into other states makes me think that--and they would have had Frances Joliffe working too, although she had by this time, poor girl, been stricken with what proved to be cancer later and of which she died. But I don't remember anything but a general campaign here. There were speakers here and I myself spoke in San Francisco, but it was more against the president. I remember very well making a speech in San Francisco in which I said the plea is to women particularly, who hate violence and have regard for progeny, that the president has kept us out of war. And I said, "It isn't the president who has kept us out of war; it is the people and the great peace sentiment in this country. They have employed without knowing it the same pressure on the president that we are applying politically; they have, by the massive feeling for peace, prevented his entering war, no matter what his personal feelings were. And I very much suspect that in his love, almost adoration, of the British--certainly of their constitution, their form of government--he might easily have put us into war to help them because they were so hard-pressed. If we later go into war it will be because of some unforeseen," I was almost a prophet, you see, in this, "unforeseen event that affects us in order to disturb this public opinion for peace that is now so prevalent in the land."

And that was to prove absolutely true; the blowing up of the Lusitania* --not the Lusitania, because it was on April 6 of

*The Lusitania was sunk May 17, 1915, with the loss of 128 American lives. On August 19, 1916, two American lives were lost when the English liner Arabic was torpedoed, and on March 24, 1916, several Americans were injured when the unarmed channel steamer Sussex was sunk without warning.

Field: the next year that the President made his declaration of war.* What was the name of the ship? It was loaded with arms for the British. And that did arouse the public sentiment to a degree that Wilson could make his declaration of war the following April and get away with it.

Even so, there was an enormous uprising against it. I joined a group called the People's Council that traveled about from place to place and were arrested often. I was arrested on the streets of Chicago for my opposition to the war, in connection with this party, but for some reason the word went out to the officers who were taking us in custody to let us go. We were suddenly told, "Go home," and we never knew why. I have a feeling it was the mayor there who in some way intervened. He was, I'm sorry to say, a very corrupt mayor and used the Democratic Party, and for some reason he saw harm in it being publicized that otherwise innocent people who just met to protest the war should be arrested. That was an interlude I can't remember--

Fry: During the presidential campaign you went to such places as Reno--

Field: Yes. I think I was called to Salt Lake City for a special meeting. Again, my memory, which has been covered up by so much since, fails me in knowing exactly the details of that, but working my way back from a big meeting that I addressed in Salt Lake City, I telegraphed Anne Martin to see if she would like to have me speak in Reno and I certainly did speak in some of the small towns as I came across Nevada, Wells being one of the places. I happen to remember that well because we had to hold the meeting on the porch of the only hotel in Wells, a tiny barren spot in the midst of a great sheep-grazing country. While the meeting was in progress who should walk in but our own representative, [William] Kent and two of his sons who had just come off a sheep ranch in their great boots. They made a spectacular and very welcome sight to me because I knew, or thought, that they were very much in sympathy with us. As it turned out later, it took Mrs. Kent to be the one to go out against the president and Congressman Kent, as I think he was then, was out for him.

Fry: Well, this also happened to you and Erskine, didn't it? Your

*President Wilson read his war message to Congress on April 2, 1917; on April 6, Congress declared war on Germany.

Fry: campaign efforts kind of canceled out each other once or twice, didn't they, when you campaigned against the Democrats and he for them?

Field: Indeed they did. It was written up as very humorous in some of the papers that this was an interesting demonstration of very significant character, that a husband could be for a candidate and a wife against him. Of course, some papers used that as an argument against suffrage, saying it would cause dissension in families. Others pointed out that in the particular cases mentioned they were extremely loving and friendly.

Fry: I think you told me that one evening you were speaking on one side of town in Portland--

Field: Yes. That was after Inez Milholland and I had had some meetings together. That was why I was called to Salt Lake City. It just comes back to me, that Inez Milholland was scheduled to speak there, and she said she wouldn't speak unless she could have a supporting speaker, because she hadn't considered herself a strong enough speaker. She didn't need to be a strong speaker; she was so beautiful that [it was enough] just to look at her and know she stood so strongly for women with all that beauty and charm, which isn't usually associated with the suffragist cause but more with that clinging-vine helpless female. But she had strength of character as well as beauty and a very firm allegiance to women. I was called there to be the supporting speaker. We spoke there together and then we went--I think that was the only meeting we had together. We had to go on in the train to wherever a junction was that would take her south to speak and I was to go north, and that was the time I spoke in Portland.

On the train I noticed that she didn't want to talk at all. We shared the same seat; she sat by the window with a her hand supporting her face, and she was white and tired looking just from this one speech. Of course, it was on that same trip that while she was talking in Los Angeles where she'd been sent, that she raised her arm and said, "Mr. President, how long must women wait for justice?" and fell in a faint. She was taken to a hotel, and though her husband came and give as many pints as they allow a person to have taken of his blood, and everyone else who had the same kind of blood, they found she had this very serious pernicious anemia and couldn't be saved. She died within a few weeks. And that's why the later memorial meetings were held, of which I'd like to speak in the next tape recording if that's all right.

Fry: You were about to tell about your speaking in Portland on one side with Erskine on the other.

Field: Yes. When I got there I found he was scheduled for a meeting for Wilson. He and I had a talk, and I said, "How could you back down from your position, because you were so against war before, and so glad you had supported Wilson's candidacy in Oregon?" which he was credited with winning for Wilson because that, like California, was also a very Republican state.

He said, "Because I feel that he has set in motion, in spite of failing you on this amendment, democratic processes that I trust. I think his Fourteen Points and his desire for a League of Nations--" (this was before he so badly failed on that). He said, "I feel these things are too important for me to go out against him."

And I said, "Well, I'm pledged to one loyalty and it's very conflicting. I feel as you do about the Fourteen Points; I feel as you do about many principles; but I simply cannot [see] women wearing out their lives fighting this thing state by state when they could be using their energies in the way you're using yours now. So I must go on with the meeting that I'm having."

[Laughs] Word came to me later that I had a larger crowd than he did, although he was a most attractive speaker everywhere he went, especially in his own home state. I felt that we were an example of how two people who loved each other very much could differ without rancor or resentment. I think we met afterwards and had a late supper together. He congratulated me on my crowd and I sympathized with him for having so few. [Laughs]

Fry: But this didn't help convert him?

Field: No, not till later, when Wilson plunged us into war after all, did he feel betrayed. He didn't think that incident with the ship was enough to have driven us into war. He felt it was a trade war and not a war of principle; he felt that Britain and Germany were at each other's throats for the sake of trade rivalry. He wrote some most convincing articles later on that and had a long argument with one of England's important writers--his name escapes me for the moment. The letters pro and con were published in one of the English papers and he also published an article very much against Wilson not taking more skilled advisers with him to Paris for the Peace Treaty. He wrote that for Marion Reedy's Mirror.

Fry: This exchange of letters was published in England?

Field: All, except the latter ones that I speak of were in the Mirror.

Fry: He was writing quite a bit at this time, wasn't he?

Field: Oh, a great deal; he always was writing even when he had probably the largest admiralty practice on the coast. His specialty was admiralty law and he was on one side or the other of every admiralty case that came up, so that everybody marveled at his tremendous ability to carry on in between. He wrote a great deal; he wrote constantly for the Pacific Monthly. He really helped to form, I think, opinion on this coast as much as anyone that's ever written in our times, so much so that one of the young professors in years after his death said he couldn't open a single paper without finding Colonel Wood's name in it and his advocacy of great causes. He was a perfect stranger to me. He wrote to ask if he could undertake his [Colonel Wood's] biography, which he's still working on.

The Mooney and Billings Case

Fry: I wanted to ask you one more thing you did before the Presidential election: while you were back here in San Francisco in September 1916 I believe you made a speech at the trial of Billings, in the Mooney and Billings case.

Field: Yes, later on I did make some [for Mooney], but this was in the case of Billings. The evidence was always overpowering, both to Erskine and me, as to the innocence of these men (however agitating they had been as labor leaders) and how determined big business was to get them. Nevertheless, of course, in the light of justice it's one of the most unjust cases--all the trials of Mooney and Billings (And another man who I think was released quite soon afterwards; I believe my memory doesn't hold out for all these details of names). I was summoned rather hastily to speak at this Billings meeting. Emma Goldman had been scheduled to speak, and at the last moment she was either ill or detained in the south and the committee phoned me and asked me if I would speak. I felt at first that I couldn't do it because I didn't want to mix up what I was doing for suffrage at that time with anything else. I thought I ought to concentrate so that the people who were against Mooney and Billings and the other involved people couldn't hold it against my suffrage activities.

But they were so persistent and they said, "We just can't tell you what it would mean to have a woman who is convinced of this evidence and what it implies as to their guiltlessness. We can't bear to have a meeting without a well-known woman who would do this." Well, I didn't know it was a brave act,

Field: but I was told afterwards it was a wonder I wasn't stoned or something [laughs] but nothing happened. I think I made a fairly good speech and all the labor leaders were extraordinarily grateful, more grateful than they needed to be because I believed in what I was saying and it didn't seem to have any bad influence on my suffrage work. As Alice Paul said afterwards, "It's all a matter of justice."

Fry: So Alice Paul thought you did the right thing, too?

Field: Yes, she did.

Fry: The presidential election came and went in November and Wilson won--

[end of interview]

XXIII PRESIDENT WILSON AND WOMAN SUFFRAGE

[April 18, 1962]

Memorial Deputation to the President

Fry: Sara, on Christmas of 1916 were you able to be home? What was going on then in the Woman's party.

Field: There were, fortunately, activities that I could take part in in San Francisco at that time. In October [1916] one of our most beautiful girls, of whom I've spoken before, Inez Milholland, had died most dramatically, if one can speak of tragedy in terms of drama. We felt that she had been in a way a martyr to the cause, because, in the last days of what she didn't herself know was a fatal illness, she had been making speeches in many of the big cities in the West. So it was determined then that she would wish her death to be, you might say, used as a help in forwarding the cause, which led to a kind of dilemma. We had made every sort of deputation to the president that we knew how to do and there had been endless pleas by very prominent women who got individual interviews, and nothing was elicited from the president but the old statement that he felt it was a matter for the states.

Alice Paul with her true instinct for pageantry and drama to keep the suffrage movement alive decided that we should have memorial services for Inez Milholland all over the country and then head them up, or bring them to a head, in January 1917 in a final deputation to the president before we took more, you might say, drastic measures. I think that almost every large city--certainly every city that had a branch of the Woman's Party--organized an Inez Milholland memorial meeting.

The one in which I could help, or to which I could contribute, was in a small Episcopal church whose actual name I cannot remember but which was way out Clay Street, it

Field: seems to me--one of the streets which runs north and south. There in the afternoon of Christmas Day (the morning of which I had spent happily with my children, who went with me to this memorial service), we held our San Francisco memorial to Inez Milholland. I remember very little of what I said then, other than what you would naturally say of a woman who had given so much and whose life and dedication had been from early childhood to the cause of women, and whose beauty was such as would have made many women content to live a life of adoration. But I do remember how solemn it was, how beautiful the organ music was, and how a reading that I gave from the Poet in the Desert, which my husband had written on death and sorrow, was received with reverent appreciation, and then the meeting ended with some very beautiful choir singing.

The follow-up of which I speak occurred in Washington I think around early January. I know that our deputation to the president was on the ninth of January, 1917. There had been such national publicity on the whole Milholland affair that the President evidently couldn't refuse a deputation. We told him it would be a deputation to memorialize Miss Milholland--he couldn't very well refuse that! But I can see that he expected we'd simply come in and talk about her and not turn it into another plea that he use his influence with his party.

Fry: My impression is that he felt betrayed when the plea was entered.

Field: Oh, he did, and for a man of as much discipline as we had always felt he had showed a most undisciplined temper. His face darkened as the speeches went on, and by the time I made what I think was the closing speech I spoke against a very black thundercloud and there was none of the response that had been in his eyes when I had come on before with the big petition. He made a very terse and angry reply, saying that he had no idea that we had come to beg of him or that he would have denied the chance, and he was in fact in such an obdurate mood that it sent us from the White House with a bleak discouragement. We knew then that we had to use some much more drastic means and we had decided, in a meeting that was held just before we went to the White House, that if he refused we would have to picket the White House.

Picketing the White House

- Fry: This was a plan that was already packaged and ready to open up at any moment?
- Field: Absolutely. Alice Paul had personally interviewed such members of the Woman's Party as she felt were capable of doing it. She wanted me to do it. I was very sorry to have to refuse, but I had already been somewhat weakened in health by the long trip I had taken [across the country] the year before to the president. And also prospects of the future were such that my life really was involved in too many other lives for me to take the risk of going to jail, which it [picketing] would inevitably lead to, and perhaps of hunger strikes. I was an arrested case of TB and felt that I did not, as so many other women who agreed to picket, have that independence of decision that they had. So very reluctantly I had to refuse, and it's been one of the sorrows of my life that I couldn't do it. But as things turned out afterwards it proved, I guess, to be the wise decision.
- Fry: How did Alice Paul take your refusal? How did you manage to make it stick to someone so insistent?
- Field: I think she herself never quite forgave me when I said to her, "Alice, picketing means jail, and jail means probably hunger strikes, because we can't just stay in jail the rest of our lives and we'll have to try there still more drastic processes."
- She said, "Yes, that's likely."
- And I said, "Well, for a person with my health record it would mean a very possible death."
- She said, "Well, that would be very good for the cause." She spared nobody because she was willing to give everything herself. But this time I was firm. I felt she too was a single woman without any ties or children and that I had just had to make this independent decision.
- Fry: We might mention here too that you and Erskine knew that in just a short time he would be free to come down to San Francisco.
- Field: Yes, we did know that, and it so happened that this came about. For their [the children's and Colonel Wood's] sakes I cannot regret the decision, but there's always a sorrow in life that you can't go the ultimate for a cause in which you believe so fully. My dear Erskine tried to make me believe that I had done

Field: the ultimate in taking the trip itself. He hadn't been very favorable to that, but he was willing I should try.

Fry: Did you go right home then or did you stay for the merger of the Woman's Party with the Congressional Union on March 2, 1917?

Field: Well, Chita, I went home then, because I knew that the convention that was to follow would be to settle merely formal and technical matters of uniting what was already formed, the Woman's Party (whose membership had been only voting women), with the eastern body of the Congressional Union and making it in spite of the lack of the vote in the East all one party, working in every political way that was possible to bring pressure on the administration.

Fry: This would give them a broader financial base, too.

Field: Much broader, and a much more--what you might say an advantage of proximity. Women right there in the East near Washington could do many things that Western women couldn't travel across the continent to do. We could always use our political power out here as far as possible in going out against the candidates, but we couldn't many of us go on and picket week after week, even those who were stronger than I, and I don't think that among those pickets there were very many Western women. They were unable to go.

So I came home then and I'm glad to state that I stayed through that spring and, it seems to me, that summer--I will have to check whether it was that summer of 1918, that I went back to Newport, Rhode Island, where Mrs. Belmont was spending the summer, to ghost write her life.

World War I and Woman Suffrage

Fry: When war was declared do you remember any special activities that went on out here?

Field: Oh yes, indeed I do. Now it comes back to me, the formation of the People's Council, which was a group that was unalterably opposed to our getting into that war. They were composed of many very prominent people as well as some that weren't prominent at all but were earnest and extremely dedicated. I don't think anybody had expected Wilson to let anything tempt him into the war. The sentiment against it was so strong in America. As I think I have said before, in my own speeches asking Western women not to vote for him on the ground that he

- Field: had not given women the power to vote about war or anything else, I said, "When he says he kept us out of war it isn't he that's kept us out of war, it's the people and the sentiment in this country." And that was I'm sure the thought that everybody cherished in their breast, that Wilson was strongly antiwar. When the blowing up of the Lusitania, which was carrying arms to Britain, happened, I think that Wilson's powerful sympathy with Britain and its form of government and his sense of their danger there, the little island so near [the continent], was such that he simply couldn't refuse.
- Fry: What about the other suffrage speakers with whom you were campaigning while the Lusitania incident was going on and a lot of other incidents kept building up; how did they feel about this?
- Field: They felt outraged, [this] playing on what we knew was the sentiment of the country.
- Fry: They weren't carried along with this buildup against Germany?
- Field: Oh, in the [inaudible] section they were; of course there always is, but I would say that the saner body politics was not at all in favor of the war. I would say that the rank and file of the Woman's Party members were against it, and we felt that we could say as we went out to fight other candidates, "You see how little you can trust authority. We women have to get an amendment to the constitution because the constitution can't be just brushed aside as our feelings about war have been." It strengthened our position in a way very much, because of the instability that you felt was in any party's mere--commendation of a cause. It [support for woman's suffrage] had to be something very much more profound than a commendation; it had to be a constitutional amendment; and the war only emphasized that. I think the peace-loving nature of the women I knew, all the prominent women, so strengthened their feeling that they must work harder for this amendment to give women a chance to speak in time for peace or war that they were even more willing to do things than before.
- Fry: If the Woman's Party rank and file went along with the rest of the nation in this build-up of feeling against Germany as the war psychology gradually took hold, I wondered if you had any idea whether the Woman's Party kept up with this or whether it lagged behind.
- Field: It had to be just a strong feeling. We didn't feel we could abandon our cause to work against the war because then we wouldn't be single purpose, and as I say our purpose was to get a constitutional amendment and therefore it had to be the whole-

- Field: hearted concentration of a growingly powerful party, so that we didn't split our efforts. But in personal conversation with all these women--Mrs. Lawrence Lewis, for instance, was a very powerful woman in the cause with whom I stayed for a while on these different visits. I know she was extremely pacifist, and so was Mrs. Florence [Bayard] Hilles, who had been a powerful worker in our party and remained so to her death. But as I say we couldn't actually organize against the war.
- Fry: But it would be interesting, for instance, for any social historian later on if they could know what segments of the population got carried away and swept into this feeling that we must go to war with Germany. I was wondering how the women fitted in with that, personally.
- Field: I think there was a feeling of great opposition to it, but they simply had to go on with the work of the Woman's Party. But basically they opposed it.
- Fry: So the People's Council was formed in San Francisco. What kind of people went in with this and who were they?
- Field: You know, that was over so soon and events were nearing that have so clouded my memory of details that I can't remember exactly the people that were in it. I know that I traveled with them somewhat and that we were not allowed to speak in certain cities. That, of course, would indicate that there was a growing number of people who sympathized with the war in general, outside of the Woman's Party (because this had nothing to do with the Woman's Party at all). My feelings for peace were as strong as my feelings for enfranchisement, and I joined this separate organization and worked with it. But it was over very briefly because we were sent--we'd go to a city and be refused any hall to meet in.

Finally, as I have told you, in Chicago good old Mayor Thompson again--I shouldn't say good old Mayor Thompson, he was probably the worst crook that ever held office, but I certainly didn't know it until later years and he seemed to me open to the liberal causes--he allowed us to speak in Chicago. We were just about to speak when police came in to arrest us. We were taken out on the street with the police to be put in jail when suddenly some great powerful person--I don't know whether it was through the mayor or what--sent a message to the police to let us go. We were all just told we were free but that we couldn't go back to speak. So we never held any meetings anywhere. We never had a chance to speak and it [the People's Council] just had to disperse because we didn't have the funds to keep on traveling like

- Field: this in vain. It was a brief but brave group, and there were many prominent people in it but, Chita, I just can't remember who they were.
- Fry: Was this organized in several states?
- Field: Oh yes, it was organized in several states, but not many could go on this trip, which was a very precarious one and rather futile except for the news value it carried.
- Fry: Was your opposition to the war taking the form of requesting that we pull out of the war, or was it on more of an idealistic level, saying that we should not have entered it in the first place?
- Field: I think it was more or less a feeling of being betrayed by Wilson, we had believed so strongly in the refusal to go into the war before the Lusitania that the Lusitania wasn't grounds enough. After all there was a war on, and naturally the enemy would blow up any ship which it thought was carrying arms, and we shouldn't have allowed the ships to carry arms. I think many of us later on felt a deep sympathy with Britain as her position became more and more precarious and I think those times are very hard for one to know--where the mind says one thing and the heart another. I do think the sentiment for the need of our help did grow as Britain's precarious condition became worse, but I think we also felt that we had done very wrong in not awakening to the danger of Hitler.
- Fry: In World War II?
- Field: Yes, in World War II.
- Fry: Do you remember people in your circles warning anyone about the kaiser, the way a few people tried to do about Hitler later on?
- Field: No, I don't. That was so definitely a trade war. I had confused the two wars, because I got to thinking of how World War I led into World War II, because the peace treaty had been so inadequate and Wilson took on so few really skilled authoritative advisers. He had such full confidence in himself to do everything, and he went over a hero and came back a defeated man.
- Fry: So the People's Council, then, was simply speaking against the war?
- Field: And showing that it was really a trade war, that there were no really great principles involved, that Germany and Britain had been rivals in trade to a degree where it had erupted in a war.

[end of interview]

XXIV POLITICS, NEWPORT, AND TRAGEDY

[May 3, 1962]

The Second Oregon Campaign

Field: Emma Wold was Norwegian; her mother was cousin to Ibsen, the playwright, and Thelma (as I insisted on calling her because I had just read a book a few years before about a Norwegian girl with that name and it seemed to fit her much better than Emma, so I shall call her Thelma in all my references to her) too had that type of mind, almost like sharp ice, that could cut through and see clearly what a problem was. When I met her she was head of the mathematics department at Lincoln High School, the best high school in Portland. Later she went on to Washington D.C. to study law and became a real authority in all national law pertaining to women. She went to George Washington University there. So when my trips took me to Washington after she went there to live (and I would have to look up that date), she always, with her co-mate Julia Emory, offered hospitality to me, and to my husband, too. We would stay at their apartment and meet with all the interesting people in Washington who both Julia and Thelma attracted to themselves. All through life, from the time I met her, we never were apart in our affection, though often there were long silences between us because we were both busy women.

Fry: So she went into the legal aspects of women's rights?

Field: Later on, yes. During the actual campaign she worked at the Woman's Party headquarters. There was plenty to do there in Washington.

In the two campaigns there, one [for] women's suffrage and later, when we had formed our Woman's Party to make the voting women of the West conversant with the resolutions of the party and the historical need for the voting women with the power

Field: of the vote to stand behind the efforts to pass the amendment, I made another campaign into Oregon, a very different campaign, because by this time suffrage had of course become very fashionable, our women having gained it. The society women were plunging in and taking a very active part against the Woman's Party.

Fry: But for suffrage by states?

Field: Yes. So my lot was extremely hard during that time. In one letter to Thelma I speak of that, how malicious they really were sometimes. That was harder to go up against really than the chilly indifference, you might say, to gaining the vote for suffrage that I had met in the Oregon state campaign, because that could be overcome.

I went back to what had been my home state and began a campaign to teach women what the Woman's Party stood for, and get their warm support. Here are a few paragraphs from the letter I wrote to Thelma from Baker, Oregon, on this second campaign:

I arrived here to find that I was to speak at a Republican rally with Mrs. Hanley of the Hughes alliance. Mrs. Hanley refused to speak with a member of the Woman's Party, so I had gracefully withdrawn. There is a Leola Bayer or some such person here with Mrs. Hanley on the Oregonian, and not meaning to be pun-ish, she is unbearable. She thinks I am the scum of the earth, and Mrs. Hanley is chosen to sit on the right hand of God forevermore. Those are her sentiments. So I leave here tonight for Pendleton.

That gives you a kind of feeling of the hostility that was beginning to be aroused by the Woman's Party attitude, which was hard for stupid women to understand.

Fry: Was this fairly typical?

Field: Well, it was strangely typical in this respect, of so many Republican women that we would have expected to stand by us, because while we weren't a pro party for any candidate or any party at all, we were anti [the party in power] and the implication was that if we voted at all we would vote for a Republican, even if it was against our political [party] principles.

Fry: Specifically, why were they hostile to you?

Field: I think probably my relations with Colonel Wood were well known

- Field: by this time in Oregon. I had been maligned on the platform in some places where I spoke. They would, you might say, prepare the ground against me. They were also anti-party--anti-Woman's Party. They weren't anti-suffrage, but they stood by the old state line of state-by-state suffrage. The going was hard then.
- Fry: But this was not a big enough disadvantage to send someone else to Oregon for the Woman's Party, for instance?
- Field: No, not at all, and I must say for Alice Paul that she knew all the story and never hesitated to use me just the same.

Mrs. Belmont's "Autobiography"

- Fry: How did you first meet Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont?
- Field: I think I should first say that of course Mr. Belmont was her second husband. She had been married to William K. Vanderbilt previously and got a divorce from him. He was the son of old Cornelius Vanderbilt, who was the founder of the Vanderbilt dynasty and fortune. She had startled the whole world, really, by getting a divorce. It was almost unheard-of in her social set in those days, and about that we will speak perhaps a little later. I didn't know about it until the time came when I was to ghost her life preparatory to a so-called autobiography.

I met her at the World's Fair at the time I left for the long trip across country. She was delighted with my speech that I made at the time of the departure and with my whole sense of dedication to the particular cause I was to represent. She had become herself completely dedicated to this cause, and this was done with the same power in which she had established herself formerly as a leader of the social set in Newport, Rhode Island. So she brought a dynamic energy with her always, and a lot of money that was very valuable to the party. We were renting a campaign headquarters, the old Dolly Madison house, and she was paying the rent of it, which was enormous. Later, she gave a headquarters of our own, and that is still in the hands of the Woman's Party. They're now lobbying for an equalization in the laws, for women. It's down Connecticut Street [Avenue] just a little ways from the White House.

She did not approach me at that time about ghosting her life and I had no idea that she had the admiration for me that I later found she did have. After I had made the long trip and

Field: stood the test of the arduous journey and she knew more details of that, and she heard me speak in the East when I arrived, and especially the speech I made at [inaudible] where I was provoked into an unusually fervent speech by the skeptical attitude of the women on the press. I felt they took a hostile and definitely unpleasant attitude toward us because Frances Joliffe had been scheduled to come with me (and I think was erroneously advertised by the party as one who had crossed the country) and she turned up only in Albany at the governor's reception. There they discovered she had come in by train, so they thought I had, too. I had the feeling that I had to overcome this skepticism, because the press was of extreme importance to us and they were more or less putting their women correspondents on this matter.

So I evidently spoke with a kind of fervor that Mrs. Belmont approved of [laughs] and had herself. I would call it, perhaps, in her case vehemence. She couldn't do anything by halves, it was always all the way or nothing. But some time during this whole ending of the campaign she approached me about coming to her one summer, to begin with, for helping her with this autobiography.

I owed a good deal of money, as I thought, to my beloved Erskine, because in years past he had had to help so much to see me through my hospital, or rather, institutional experience at the time that I broke after the suffrage campaign in Oregon and had to go to Pasadena.

So I told her that I would think it over, and I eventually did go to her in the summer of 1917. I was never attracted to Mrs. Belmont as a character, except on the side of her tremendous faith in women, which was accompanied by a kind of outrage against the fact that they took always secondary place in society. She herself had achieved, you see, a first place of leadership among the so-called four hundred of her day, when she was Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt. I was to find out to my great distress that her daughter had been sacrificed to this, because she was determined that her daughter should marry the Duke of Marlborough and become a duchess, whereas the daughter disliked this man and was much in love with a young [inaudible] student. Fearing that her daughter might elope or might run away, she was kept locked in her room till the day of her marriage and practically a prisoner. Of course, when I discovered all these things I felt that her faith in women was only a power drive and not a drive in which woman was to be understood.

Fry: It was a sort of a drive which must have been motivated by this rage you speak of, against something?

Field: Yes. She had been treated outrageously by William K. Vanderbilt.

Field: He had brought his mistresses right into her home, and he had deliberately tried to offend her in more ways than one. I think that there was so much of personal animosity in her against men and their treatment of women, even though she had what seemed like a very quiet and rather companionable marriage with Mr. Belmont. It was as if something had gone deep in her and the rancor had to be expressed and had to be expressed violently. If she went into a thing she went into it with, as I say, an unwonted vehemence.

I found that it wasn't a faith in women [that motivated her]; I think (and thought then, though I hadn't the wisdom and experience to know why I felt it so deeply), that if you have faith in women you have faith in a woman. Her treatment of her women servants was so abominable they all hated her and served her with hatred, but she paid large wages, because even at that time the first difficulties of getting adequate help, especially in these great mansions that needed retinues of servants, was beginning to be felt.

I had really deep in my heart no intention of living in her house if I could possibly avoid it, but when I got there I found she had given me a suite of rooms, a private maid (to come in, if you please, and bathe me, much to my embarrassment; I was quite used to bathing myself as well as doing many other menial tasks which I wasn't allowed to do), and I found it hard to extricate myself from her strong-willed opposition that I should be anywhere else. Also her social life went on apace and she was rather proud to show me off. I was young and not unattractive and she insisted that I should come to these functions of hers, which bored me very greatly. Nobody, or almost nobody, really was of one's own inner heart's persuasion, and it ended in my feeling I wasn't earning what I'd come on to do.

Fry: Could you tell us your impressions of people at those parties, and what seemed to be their interests?

Field: Well, perhaps if I hadn't been there on a definite mission or a definite engagement, and hadn't mingled so much with intellectual women I would have found among them some who had other interests than their social life. But I didn't, and evidently Mrs. Belmont didn't, because I remember one day when I was still working in her library (before I persuaded her to let me go for good and sufficient reasons of getting the value from her money, and to find another dwelling place)--I was working when she came back from a bridge party and she was in a very, well, angry state of mind.

She threw her gloves down on the table and said, "I loathe these people!"

Field: I said, "Well, why do you go to them, Mrs. Belmont? If you're not happy?" and so on.

And she said, "I'm determined to keep my position among them."

And I said, "Well, why do you loathe them?"

She said, "They care for nothing but money."

"Well," I said, "I would say that it was strange that you feel that way, because of course you have a great deal of money."

And she looked at me fiercely and she said, "Surely I have. Money is power." I can't tell you with what angry sense of arrival at a conclusion that was just impossible for her to escape from, even though she had met women who thought there were things other than power.

In other words, I felt almost no sense of spiritual values other than the extension of her rage against men into a kind of protective desire to help women in general. But no feeling for the working class except, again, she'd have power to do something when they were arrayed against men. For instance, I think I have told you that previous to her suffrage interests she had gone down at the time of the women's garment union strike, when they were still poorly organized and without much means, and had been arrested for obstruction of traffic or violation of some law or other that was convenient for the management to use. She went down and sat all night in the police court bailing out these girls, one by one. I had heard of this and of course expected to find a woman who really cared in every way about them. But I will carry to my dying day a sense of her getting even with men in everything she did. Wherever an issue was involved that arrayed women against men, as let's say it did in the strike of the ladies' garment workers, or in suffrage, which was opposing men's violent opposition in the case as to women participating in government, then all the fight in her was aroused. But when it came to any personal relationship with the women who served her there was no sense of right then; there was just determination to have this power over them, which money had and which allowed her to be dictatorial and even at times cruel.

I remember one night when I was still there and had refused to go out to some elaborate party, her personal maid came into my room, knocking on the door, of course, first, and flung herself down in a chair weeping, and I said, "What is

Field: the matter, my dear?"

She said, "Oh, she struck me so hard with her hairbrush because I didn't get her hair up in a hurry."

I had a feeling of a great chasm between her [Mrs. Belmont's] attitude toward the individual and her attitude toward women in general, when they were fulfilling her desire, which was always, it seemed to me, based on a kind of revenge. I may do her great injustice but that was the sense of living in her house. It was so strong that I finally decided I just couldn't--I either had to go home or get out of the house and come back and forth. I found a charming boarding house on the outskirts of Newport, which of course was not very large, and there there were living a couple of girls about my age, or a couple of women--I seem still, looking back, to have been a girl then--who were on the Atlantic Monthly. I told Mrs. Belmont that I had found this room and that it would be more to her own interests for me to transcribe my notes that I made in her presence over there, that I could do it with less distraction, and in other words, quite plainly that she'd be getting her money's worth. I think probably this appeal, or maybe also the novelty of my presence in the house had worn off enough to allow her to assent to it. I had a very happy time there with the simple regime, a most congenial one. So I would go mornings over to Mrs. Belmont--she sent her chauffeur and her car for me, and I would go over and we would talk and I would make notes, and then I would go back to my room for the rest of the day.

Fry: You didn't do any campaigning during that summer?

Field: No. There wasn't, I think, any campaign going on then, or if there was I was excused from it. One might ask why this life was never published, and thereby hangs quite an interesting story. She had been very frank in her discussion of her marriage relations with William K. Vanderbilt and I had correspondingly been quite as explicit as she had been. Then, also, it was going to involve another summer to finish, but even the portion that I had done when I came back home--let me interrupt to say that I only transcribed my notes over at this boarding house where I lived in Newport, and was supposed to take the whole thing home and then complete the manuscript of as much of it as I had been given to do. Then I was to go back the next summer and complete it.

But in the meantime William K. Vanderbilt had gotten wind of what was being done and after her death he never allowed--I have, somewhere, clippings of the date she died; she died not too long after the whole suffrage campaign was over. She lived

- Field: to see that accomplished. I never knew what happened in 1918, or even perhaps because she was not a woman that was averse to changing her mind, [but] I did not go on the summer of 1918. For that I shall rejoice always because it gave a marvelous summer with my son who lived with me while he had a very good job in San Francisco. She decided [I was not to come back in 1918]; she postponed it for another year.
- Fry: Because Vanderbilt had heard about it?
- Field: No. That was much later. The first reason it couldn't be published after the summer of 1917 was because it wasn't finished. I think she had sent my completed manuscript, that I did in the winter after I came home from her house, as a trial, and the publishers were very anxious for it.
- Fry: Do you know which publishing company it was?
- Field: No, I don't. Whether it leaked out then to Vanderbilt what was being done or whether it was [inaudible] when all her papers were being assembled after her death, he was able, with the power of his money and influence, to stop all publication of it, so that it never was [published]. I have still in my files the carbon copy. I was approached, of course, after her death, in spite of Vanderbilt, when a decent time had gone by, to know if I wanted to do anything about it, but I didn't. I didn't wish to make money out of something that I wasn't supposed to have written--I mean to say I was supposed to have written it for her, but it was to come out under her name.
- Fry: Do you think this could be published now?
- Field: I don't know. I'd have to look into that. I have no idea what the laws [are] governing publication of a thing like that. I think she paid me two thousand dollars for that summer.
- Fry: Did you finish her life, the biography?
- Field: No, I didn't. Of course I never got back to have the final talks with her. And also she was very capricious. She was terribly interested at first, you know, enthusiastic and excited, even, but she began to lose interest, and I think as her health began to get bad she had less spirit about it.
- Fry: By the time the summer of 1918 came around she had had some second thoughts, because you had been very frank in what you wrote up, was that it?
- Field: I don't think that bothered her. How could I have been frank without her telling me? No, I don't think it was that. I

- Field: think it was that things she felt more important intervened. I really am a little unclear as to why the call to come back wasn't given.
- Fry: Was she involved any in the picketing?
- Field: She didn't do any herself, but she was of course backer of a great deal of the expense that was incurred. It was an expensive thing to do.

The Summer of 1918

- Fry: 1918 was such a pivotal year for the Woman's Party. That was the year the amendment passed the House and almost passed the Senate. Maybe all of this activity involved her too much.
- Field: Well, I have letters which I just recently found, and which I'll go over, which will give me a little more clue to the reason that the autobiography was never completed, and why even the uncompleted part (which, of course, because of its sensational character--Mrs. Belmont being the social and political figure she was) would have been valuable just the same to a publisher, even in part. But in the settlement of her estate Vanderbilt was able to prevent it.
- Fry: So this may be legally tied up.
- Field: I think it may be. That's why I said I'd have to look into it.
- This I realize is in kind of a muddle, because I didn't know until recently that I had possible sources of references on dates and mention of this. And 1918 was a year of such powerful influence on me as to deaden much of the chronology and also anything but the barest outline.
- Fry: You apparently were in Portland in March of 1918. I think you spent six weeks or two or three months in Portland in the early part of 1918.
- Field: Not summer.
- Fry: No. You had written a letter to, I think, Anne Martin, from San Francisco, and you said you had been to Portland for about six weeks to help Erskine on some of his work.
- Field: He was nearing the time when the full payment of the commission

- Field: due him on which he could retire was coming, and we could begin to see that we could get our lives together. I think I wasn't committing myself to much activity on that account. It was, in the end, decided more by the inevitability of fate than it was by the slow maturing of the plans that we had made.
- Fry: There was a branch of the Woman's Party in San Francisco, and you must have been active in it.
- Field: I was active in it. We continued of course to hold meetings and I would attend them, but I think I have told you that at the convention in which we decided when our next step would be taken we went off on a different track than what I had hoped.
- Fry: But this was earlier than that--this was 1918 when the women were in [inaudible] workhouse, and Anne Martin was just beginning her campaign in Nevada.
- Field: We went up to that. These letters are all probably from Anne Martin.
- Fry: According to another letter to her you weren't able to come because you had some serious illness in the summer, around July and August. But about three or four weeks later you did go, September 16.
- Field: It was just before the election, in the fall. We went to Elko. He [Colonel Wood] got a very bad sinus attack and swore with a good deal of vehemence that he was too old to go into these campaigns any more and he wasn't going to do it. So that was the end of his political participation. He had come down for a visit and for our making what we thought would be our last plans.
- Fry: Would you like to mention that now?
- Field: Yes. I think it had better be dealt with, and always with the understanding that it made a very great change in my whole attitude toward life and activity and expenditure of myself from then on, and stopped--with its severe and thunder-cloud influence, which existed I'm sorry to say for a long time in which I didn't see anybody and couldn't orient myself to life at all. This is in general what happened.

Albert

I had had a wonderful summer, in spite of illness, with my son. My daughter had gone east with her father to visit his

Field:

relatives, and Albert and I had been left alone. We discovered, because he was then maturing very fast, that we had a great deal in common. There was nothing of a foreboding nature in our relationship. I was always aware, without knowing Freud or Jung or any of the other psychoanalysts, that a mother should begin loosening the emotional hold she has on her son, so I think that our relationship was extremely healthy. He always brought the young girls he was interested in up to see me, at least he had brought most of them. He said the ones that were just pretty and didn't have much in their heads he didn't bring. But he brought one girl who later became the wife of a Dr. Collins, who is [inaudible] this day and I think probably it might have eventuated in a marriage between her and my son Albert. But that of course [was] out of all consideration at that time. They were both high school seniors. She was on the editorial board of the University High School, which has since been given up, in Oakland. They were both very good students there. Albert wasn't one of these bookworms; he was extremely popular with the boys even in sports for which he had no particular leaning. The football team loved him so much that they insisted he go along to every game as their first aid in case of accident, so he would go along with his first-aid kit and participated, in that rather indirect way, in all their activities.

But nevertheless there was between us a peculiar understanding. We could talk about words, often. When I had to leave one day, just for an overnight visit to a friend I had long promised to visit, I left a note for him saying, "I hate to go away for even one day and night, and only did so because a promise was a promise and I couldn't sleep." To my astonishment, the next morning at breakfast at this friend's house, which was on Russian River, there was a letter by my plate. He had gone all the way down to the post office that night and mailed it special delivery, in answer to me. I had said in my note that every hour with him was precious because I felt the great Juggernaut of war was somehow creeping up on us. You understand we were still in the First World War and he was of military age the next birthday.

He wrote me this letter (which I have), for me not to fear, that he could never bring himself to kill anybody and that if he didn't have the spirit of a conscientious objector he would certainly rouse it in him unless he could be in some position in the military forces that was ameliorative and not killing. It was a beautiful declaration of a boy about to arrive at young manhood (he really had, intellectually) of his sense of opposition to the war, which was still held by I think many many thousands of people in this country. Certainly all of his Quaker ancestry came out in his hatred of killing. As a little boy he couldn't

Field:

bear to even kill a fly. It sounds as if he were a sissy, but he was anything but a sissy. He was strong to do what he felt was right.

Well, we had that wonderful summer together. He had a fine job with a chemical firm. It frightened me a little because he used to have to lift great pots of cyanide at times and I used to make him come home and just scrub violently, for fear a whiff of it might be left somewhere on his person.

By the time that he had to go back to school over here in Berkeley, or Oakland--the University High School--Anne Martin's campaign had come on, and I received begging letters from her, really begging, to come and give her a hand, that it was a man's state and that she could only win by the most supreme effort. I ought to say she was running for senator. So I persuaded my husband (who had come down expecting only to visit and then go back and settle all his affairs and return) to go to Nevada with me. He was quite averse to it, because he had come down really for a rest, and I think it was a little overzealous on my part to urge it, because he was subject to [sinus attacks from] the dust of Nevada. But we went. He went as far as Elko, where I understand he made a magnificent talk. He had known Anne for quite a long time through me and he believed in Anne. She was a forceful, resolute person with an excellent mind, a graduate of the University of Nevada and I think had done some graduate work at other universities, and he had great respect for her. So he did go, and I went. What places I spoke in I have forgotten now, but I think it was confined mostly to Reno.

The Accident

After I came back the children were both in school, of course, but they always came to see me weekends and we decided we'd have a reunion, a picnic as a marker of it. Erskine didn't go back to Portland; he had stayed on, and he intended to go back after this. On this picnic trip we had the auto accident, we went over a cliff, and my son was killed. Erskine had a near concussion, [and] he was badly cut in the back of the neck. My daughter was absolutely unhurt. I remember she was frightened terribly as we lay under the car waiting for help, and I had that strange courage without knowing whether Albert was alive or dead, because he wouldn't respond to my calls. He had been in the back seat. They had just changed their positions in the car. They were so anxious to be near me at the times we had together that at first Kay sat beside

Field:

me in the front seat and then Albert sat behind--no, I beg your pardon, at first Albert sat with me in the front seat and then the positions were changed and he sat in the back seat, and the car landed square on his heart and chest and he died without ever regaining consciousness, even after he was taken to the hospital. I didn't know it till the next morning but I very much suspected it. But under the car I, with my right leg broken in two places, was able to hold Kay in my arms and sing to her, try to quiet her hysterical terror, and after that I went into complete shock. My husband was able, by a miraculous effort--he was thrown free of the car, the only one that was--and he was able to climb the steep bank and hail an auto that brought a rescue squad to us. We were lifted away from the car up the hill and taken to a hospital, and from there on things were pretty blank in my mind. I learned the next morning that Albert was gone.

I had to be operated on, of course, for this leg. Kay, as I say, was unhurt except for the fright, but she was very young, and thank God, it doesn't seem to have left any mark on her that I can see. She never refers to it. I was taken to a dreadful hospital at first--I think it was called Mission Hospital--where the care was very poor, but it was found of course that I had to be operated on for this leg--or rather it had to be put in a cast. It was only later that the operation was found to be necessary. So I was taken to Ross Hospital, which was near the place that we had the accident.

I ought to say that this accident occurred in Marin County. (I knew this would be a very mixed [account] because the minute I begin to talk about it my mind goes a little haywire.) We had gone over to Marin County. Everything seemed destiny; I have to face that, that the inevitable was to be taken as such, because I was getting, when it was time to go home--we had a wonderful time, up on a hill in Marin County, and then we came down and we drove about Marin County, which was very rural in those days. The old road was there, none of this superhighway business, and what was called a highway was a winding, lovely road through many beautiful parts of Marin.

Then I said, "We've got to turn around, I'm getting a little tired." I was just a new driver, incidentally. "And I think that we'd better head toward the ferry."

And Albert said, "Oh, Mother, you know I know every foot

Field: of this county. Homer Johansen" (One of his pals who lived in Marin County) "and I have tramped all over this county, and there's one beautiful road that I want you to go out," and he missed it by one road.

We started up what was known as the worst hill in all of Marin County; it was called White's Hill. I afterwards learned that there'd been innumerable accidents on that road. As we began to climb I got frightened and I said, "I think that this is all wrong."

"Oh," he said, "I just had the wrong road, Mother."

And my husband--I put the brakes on--got out of the car and said, "I think we haven't come so far but what you can back down." Well, we were driving a car that has long since gone out because its mechanism was so poor (though it was a very expensive car, called a Chandler), and it seems that the spring shackle was out of joint in that car. We had no control at all over reverse. And of course as soon as I put the car in reverse it began to slip, slip, slip toward the other side even though I turned the wheel desperately toward the high bank side of the road. It wouldn't go. The force of gravitation just took over and the first thing we knew we were over. [Fighting back tears] It all happened, as those things do, in such a twinkling of an eye that looking back you can hardly separate the time that it hadn't happened and the time that it did happen.

But it also separated my life definitely. It cut it in two in a curious way.

[end of interview]

XXV RETURN TO SAN FRANCISCO

[May 10, 1962]

Anti-War Activities

Fry: Sara, you have a letter there referring to the summer of 1917, when apparently you were very active in some antiwar movement in San Francisco.

Field: Yes, I was, and I think in connection with that I ought to say that never in the Second World War was there as much opposition to the whole idea of war as there was at this time. The country had been, of course, isolationist, too much so in some ways; in this sense: that it would not support President Wilson's League of Nations. It didn't even want to commit itself that far to any international connections, and much less did it want to get involved in a European war. So there were many meetings, until of course the espionage act was passed [June 15, 1917] and of course it made people less brave about speaking out. But the discontent and opposition were immense just the same, as a running undercurrent.

Fry: About this same time, I believe, there was a California state act passed which was much more limiting, even, than the national espionage act, and I wondered if you noticed whether this cut down any activities in California as compared, say, with New York, when you travelled there and other places.

Field: Well, I think it did, because at first the open rebellion was very much more marked than it later became, but was always there, suppressed. It must have been that that California act had its impact on the people so far as publicly speaking out, and that is why I spoke at meetings in July 1917--when we had begun a very active, you might say, recruiting of public opinion. I'm trying to think why we called it disarmament. It wasn't disarmament; it was

Field: armament. Perhaps it was because I was so much connected with the disarmament idea that I remember that side of it and had really forgotten, until you reminded me, that it was so early that the espionage act was passed. It must have had limitations and qualifications that I can't recall, because there were protests that went on. I think we ought to look up what year Debs was arrested, because that made a great stir in this country.

Fry: He was arrested in 1919, I believe. At least he was convicted in April 1919.

Field: Well, you can see that in spite of the espionage act (the federal one and the California one), meetings were still going on, not perhaps so numerous as they had before but certainly--In this letter to my friend Thelma Wold, which was written in July 1917, I say to her there that:

I would like to have time to describe in detail the great protest meeting held here in Dreamland Rink by the Socialists at which I spoke my soul out on conscription, and the subject "Is This a War for Democracy?" The U.S. Attorney here had threatened the arrest of all the speakers, but we stood squarely on the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and defied him to do his worst. The meeting was attended by about thirty thousand people, and this with practically no advertising. The papers would not give us a line. And such enthusiasm! Oh, it was good to feel one's soul thrilling and agreeing with a crowd again, to know temporary unity with a group.

I had made several copies of my speech on the advice of a lawyer friend, and had distributed them among a few people I knew in the audience, and I said before I began to speak that I had done this so that nothing that I said could be misquoted, and in this case I had no trouble about having made the speech. No arrests were made. Very prominent people spoke at that meeting. Rudolph Spreckels was chairman, a very rich man and very prominent in his opposition to the war, and others of equal prominence spoke. I was the only woman speaker, and they put me last on the program. I thought, Oh dear, with all these speeches, maybe the audience will be getting restless and start to go home. Though it was very late, there were very few people who left. They sat to the very end.

Incidentally, this was my first meeting with Noel Sullivan. After the meeting was over and I was gathering up my papers on the very high rostrum of the old Dreamland Rink, which has since been torn down, I looked down and here were two young men standing

Field:

and they looked as if they had come out of a Giotto painting. One had a face like an angel, blond hair, blue eyes, innocent and spiritual; the other had a beard. It looked very much as if it might be a picture of Christ and his favorite disciple. [Laughs] I looked at them in surprise and then one of them, who proved to be young Father Perrin, who was a very great liberal rector of St. Mary's Church, a little church where I spoke at the time of the Inez Milholland memorial meeting--it was he who first spoke up.

He said, "We have come here to thank you for what you said. That was a very brave speech," and then he turned to his companion, who proved to be Noel Sullivan--the one with the beard--and waited for him to say something.

Noel was very shy and slow of speech and hesitated a great deal, and with this hesitation he managed to say, "Yes." Breathless. "We felt it was a very brave speech."

And then Father Perrin took up this duet and said, "We would like to know you better," and I responded that I'd like to know them better, if they were of this same opinion that I had expressed in the speech and the others had expressed.

Then Father Perrin again looked at his friend to say something, and with many hesitations, which was his habitual way of speaking, as if he wasn't quite sure he was going to say the right word always, he said that they were having a little gathering after the meeting of musicians and poets and liberals at his apartment, and would I join them?

I leaned over--I felt a curious kind of maternal tenderness toward these two young idealists, and I sort of bent down over them from the high platform and said, "I would like very much to come, but," I said, "this is a Friday night and I always have my children on weekends. I just left them because this cause was so important to me--and I'm glad to say, young as they are, to them--and I must get back to them now." So I didn't see Noel again until--oh no, I'm wrong about that.

Then they said, "May we come to see you?"

And I said, "Yes," and we made a date.

I was then living in the half-house, the upper part of which I called the eyrie, because it was like an eagle's nest way up in the sky. On the day that was appointed for them to come--I had almost forgotten the appointment because I was very busy writing at the time--I happened to look out the window

Field: and there coming down the street were these characters, and each of them was carrying in his hand, talking volubly, a little bunch of flowers wrapped as the French do in a paper lace wrapping. They made a very wonderful sight. Well, they came up and of course we had many many points of contact and I'm happy to say it was the beginning of a long friendship that lasted until Noel died in the late fifties.

Father Perrin, alas, broke down with TB and was sent down to a sanitarium by his parishioners, in Los Angeles somewhere, and never recovered. Some people say he committed suicide, others say no, he died of the tuberculosis. I never even tried to verify that. Recently I asked a young man who was working on the Mooney case, and who had come across the name of Father Perrin again and again in connection with it, if he knew about that. He said no, it was shrouded in mystery. He'd like to find out himself.

After the Accident

Fry: After your accident, you were hospitalized at Ross for a while, and Erskine remained down here, although before it happened he had to return to Oregon, he thought.

Field: He had thought so, but he couldn't. Even if his compassion and love for me hadn't made him at all costs want to stay by my side, he had been so badly hurt in the accident--he'd had a near concussion--[that he] was in no condition physically himself to go back and take up the strenuous problems that he had to meet up there of adjustment to a new life, which he was determined then to make.

I think the accident, and all its results, was what made him feel that life was too precarious for him to delay in any way--not that he had deliberately delayed before, but this time he felt that he must do something to really push his ability to leave him family in comfort and to come down to stay with me always. But he didn't get back until, I think, nearly Christmastime.

Fry: Was that a final return?

Field: Yes. After that he came down permanently, making of course visits every now and then, short visits--much against his will, in a sense. From the time our lives got together we felt we'd waited so long that we couldn't bear to be

Field: separated at all, but he wanted to be unselfish about it.

Fry: And then you moved into a house in San Anselmo?

Field: No, quite the other way around. I went to San Francisco from the hospital but I'd been in a house in San Anselmo for many months, hoping that the broken leg would heal in a cast. I couldn't be brought home very well after the accident because my condition was a combination of shock and of actual broken bone, so my husband took a house in San Anselmo and my sister Mary Field Parton and her husband and daughter (who is now a well-known writer, Margaret Parton), all came over and stayed with us and kept house for us.

After I had been in the cast for three months, they removed it and found that the break had not healed at all, because some splinters of bone (which hadn't been located before in the x-rays) had intervened in the cracks. So they had to operate and remove those splinters and then put the cast on again. But for this, the operation being necessary, I had to go to Ross Hospital.

Fry: Where were you at Christmastime?

Field: I may be wrong about Erskine's going home at Christmas. I can't be sure, because I certainly wasn't in any condition that he felt--

Fry: You wrote a letter from the hospital in January 1919.

Field: Yes, and he was still there. I know he was. And his devotion was utterly incredible. His energy was good; he walked at least two or three miles every day [to see me] and would almost spend the day there, and when he felt they weren't feeding me proper food he'd bring what he felt was more tempting, because I had no appetite. His manner of understanding how much I needed quiet was such that he spent hours by my bed just holding my hand. (Makes you think of a dear old bishop in Les Miserables who would do that with his parishioners when they were in suffering or sorrow.)

Fry: One of the worst things must have been this feeling of isolation.

Field: I think death always has that, as I learned afterwards. Most of the poetry I was able to write, when more calm, centers around this whole thought of loss in death, and I hope not without perhaps some comfort to those who have known it.

Fry: Your poems that are concerned with death nearly always refer to Albert's death?

Field: Yes, they did, and then constantly learning to put out tentacles from my suffering and loss into the life of others as much as I could in thought, and yet never forgetting that a person is alone at the time of a loss and all you can do is to tell them you love them and understand.

Fry: What did you do when you began to get back on your feet?

Field: Well, I was on crutches for a good while even after we came back to San Francisco. I think it was probably all of six months after the accident before I was allowed to go back to San Francisco, and even there as I say I was on crutches. There is a letter written after I got back but it isn't dated. My friend Thelma Wold kept all my letters and I got them back after her death, sent by a friend. That was my one correspondent with whom I could mention even some of the difficulties through which I was passing, and I speak of the black night in the soul in spite of the fact that the clock registered the time as nine in the morning, so I must have still been under the cloud that it took me so long to penetrate.

One Roof in San Francisco

Fry: When you went back to San Francisco did you live in the same half-house?

Field: Yes. For a while we had to, but since Erskine was coming down eventually to stay and we knew he would send down his books and many of his personal belongings, (though of course everything in the house was left there for those that were left [in] the house), we began to look for property that would accommodate a larger group of things and of people. I was looking forward eventually, too, to seeing Katherine with me much more, so we found a house just a very short distance from where the eyrie was, a very lovely house on the corner of Taylor and Broadway, which we eventually called the Flowering Wall because it had a very high wall all around it on which had been planted flowering vines that hung over it. It had what Noel Sullivan loved to call a real old-fashioned garden, that had run kind of wild and gave me great pleasure because I like an air of mystery in a garden, that had run kind of wild and gave me great pleasure because I like an air of mystery in a garden and a little bit of wildness, so that it was a delightful place. The climb up Broadway was very steep, so eventually we paid for the city's permission for steps to be put up there.

- Field: It was quite a while before the tunnel went through and took all that part away. You can still see the house. I always make it a practice not to go back to places that we've left; it's like a closed chapter and I didn't want any waste of energy in nostalgia for a place once we'd moved, so when we'd gotten moved to the Cats later I never went back to the house on Taylor Street. I don't know what happened in regard to the changes that the tunnel must have certainly made, but in visiting one of my friends who lives in a high apartment in San Francisco near the Fairmont Hotel, I can look across the city and see the house, to the very bedroom in which I unfortunately was ill pretty often, or my husband was. We had some pretty bad years along in there. My health was pretty shaken.
- Fry: From your leg and from the shock?
- Field: Yes, and I suppose from other reasons which medical science at that time didn't penetrate.
- Fry: How was Erskine's health then?
- Field: He regained his very well with, of course, interruptions, but he had a constitutional vigor that was positively amazing. It seemed to come back. I remember when I had to be in the hospital for a while in San Francisco (for some minor but rather dangerous disorder) that he would walk all the way from the Taylor house to the hospital, vigorously, and back again.
- Fry: Did you and he go out for Debs then? Debs' conviction was in April of that year [1919].
- Field: Yes, we did. I don't remember our making any public speeches. I think that my husband very likely did, but I wasn't strong enough still to do that. But we all contributed to a book called Debs and the Poets, as a tribute to him from many poets, some of them good poets, some not so good. It touched Debs probably more than anything else that was done. Somewhere in those files is a letter from him in which he wrote me how touched he was by my poem.
- Fry: It gives you an idea of how many of the leading people in the arts and in the intellectual world were really against the war.
- Field: Oh, it does. It was the same in the Spanish Civil War much later on. The intellectuals were all in favor of our sending arms to help the Spanish [government].

- Field: But I don't know why it is that ignorance and belligerency seem to go together so well. I think it's because, in the first place, the rank and file of people who cry for war (or [for] no help to those nations who are fighting in a democratic cause) haven't a basic principle to begin with, and, in the second place, they haven't the intellect to think the thing through. They have no starting place from which to begin thinking, and then they can't carry on into the idea that we might be able to achieve results without violence. They just rush to violence as the easiest way--what they think is the easiest way--out.
- Fry: You don't remember groups, for instance, in San Francisco protesting the Debs conviction?
- Field: Only the intellectuals. I remember they would gather at our house and protest in groups.
- Fry: Do you remember any names?
- Field: I'm sorry, I don't. Life was all running together very much as you mix up the ingredients of a cake, or something perhaps less appealing than a cake. But it was mixed, and people came and went in our lives at that time very much.
- Fry: Was it Mr. [George] Sterling who wrote that the button on your doorbell was green because of all the thumbs that were pressing it constantly? [Laughter]
- Field: It was either John or Llewelyn Powys who wrote that. We had a bad time there on Taylor and Broadway in the way of interruptions. My husband wanted and did build a study onto the house that was way in the back, and where we thought that our helpers--we had just Chinese helpers for the most part in that house--could say we weren't home. But whether the Chinese ethics don't allow that or not we'd hardly get settled down to do some writing before there was a knock at the door, and our dear old Chinese--not so old, either, but very sweet--cook would say to us, "Ma'am, he say he know you home."
- We simply took up our lives together without any fuss or ceremony or announcement of any kind, and let people believe our lives or be impressed all the more by the kind of devotion it showed and the conviction that truth was greater than the law. We let all those people come into our lives or go from us, as they wished.
- Fry: Were you hurt by many people turning their backs on you because of this?

Field: The love we had was so deep that whatever hurt I had was very superficial. I'd be a little disturbed when I would meet someone who wouldn't want to speak to me, and then think, "How foolish that is. That person doesn't mean anything much in my life anyway. Why do I care?" I had so much that meant reality that all these things more or less seemed a natural sloughing off of the people who couldn't see what was the truth of our relationship.

Fry: Later you and Erskine began a theater school in San Francisco?

[end of interview]

XXVI ADJUSTMENT

[May 18, 1962]

Digression: Mrs. Belmont's Divorce

Fry: Sara, did Mrs. Belmont ever tell you anything about her divorce from Mr. Vanderbilt?

Field: Oh yes, of course, she had to. It had been a front-page item for some time after it once became public. She couldn't very well escape telling me about it. I've forgotten how many years she lived with Mr. Vanderbilt. I do not believe myself that it was ever a marriage of love. I think this young girl, who must have been quite pretty and very vivacious and fascinating, had come up from the South to New York, where her father's business brought them, determined to become a leader of society--and as she later, many many years later, expressed to me, "Money is power." She had set her cap for the wealthiest bachelor in New York and captivated him and married him, but I think the marriage, from the first (from many things that she said to me) must have been anything but happy.

She had untold wealth, of course, and with that name of Vanderbilt and the money and the determination in her own heart, with an almost fierce ability to accomplish anything that she set out to do, she did become the leader of the four hundred. This I think I told you before, but I wanted to say it again because of the relation, later, of her loveless marriage to her divorce. As the years passed, Mr. Vanderbilt was exceedingly difficult to live with because he was flattered by other women, especially poor women of the nobility of England who wanted to get some of his wealth one way or another, and every now and then one of them would become his mistress and of course profit by that.

Mrs. Belmont stood this for such years as were needed for her to accomplish her purpose. Having accomplished it, and with

Field: the natural seeking of her nature for something more worthwhile than mere social prominence, she began to turn to the woman question, and as she did I think was attracted herself to Mr. Belmont, who was a man of thought as well as a man of great wealth. But when she decided to marry him at all costs she had to run up against a period in which divorce was not at all common and in the upper set almost unknown. They went on having their affairs in the upper set and as long as they kept it under cover everything was all right, but as to divorce, that was another matter.

Mr. Choate,* whose first name I can't recall, was horrified at the daring thought of Mrs. Vanderbilt (as she then was) to get a divorce, and he came to her every week, after she had gone to him, I suppose, to try to retain him as her lawyer. He came to her every week to try to convince her that this was a dangerous move, that society was looked up to by the masses, looked up to enviously, and [that] the masses, as he called them, [were given] provocation to feel rebellious, by their very expensive parties, which were publicized and on which they spent thousands and thousands of dollars, at times of great misery in the country.

The social imbalance was never more emphasized than during this period that I'm speaking of, and the laboring class had not yet become fully aware of its potential power. It was just beginning to come into a realization that it had a power, which is the necessity of management for its use, and also of what sheer numbers could do.

Mr. Choate of course was not successful.

Fry: Mr. Choate felt that this was a case of bad public relations for the upper class?

Field: Oh, very bad. He pointed that out to her. I may look up the manuscript and read to you some of the things he told her in regard to this.

Fry: Did he think it might increase the divorce rate?

Field: Yes, and also arouse what was evidently lying low, a latent anger at the immense fortunes of a few as against the poverty of the masses. He genuinely seemed afraid of social upheaval. Of course, he was probably the most prominent lawyer of the day in the circles in which the then Mrs. Vanderbilt moved, and he felt

* Probably William Gardner Choate, of Choate, Larocque, and Mitchell, New York.

Field: that he could influence her. He should have known better; if he'd lived in a house with her at all, as I later did, he would know that once she made up her mind about anything there was no power on earth that could convince her about anything.

So she obtained her divorce, with him as her lawyer finally, and married Mr. O. H. P. Belmont, and that I think was a real love marriage. I think the force that later drove her to enter the social arena so far as women's cause is concerned was partly a real feeling of woman's inferior place in society and partly a loneliness after Mr. Belmont's death. It left her really without any excuse, you might say, for living, because she was worn out with social gain. I think I have told you that before her divorce, indeed some years before her remarriage to Mr. Belmont, she married off her daughter to the Duke of Marlborough. This seemed a terrible denial, to me, [of her professed concern for women, and an expression] of what was a serious contradiction in her life. Her personal relations with women were often not good, if she had any power over them at all, as of course she would over her daughter. Her daughter was a very young girl, very much in love with a young Yale student and very determined not to marry this duke. Mrs. Vanderbilt, as she still was then, saw what it would do for her social position to have a daughter married into the English nobility, and the daughter was locked in her room for days and days before the wedding for fear she would run away and fail to go through with the ceremony. Whether it was fear of her mother, [or] a combination of that and being overcome by the dignity (let us put it) or importance of being a duchess, I don't know, but she was married to him and it was one of the most unhappy marriages on record. It was one of the few marriages from which the Pope excused [a marriage partner]--it had been a Catholic marriage, and she had to get the Pope's permission for a divorce. I'm afraid it [the permission] was due to her wealth and position.

Fry: This was Consuelo?

Field: Yes, she was Mrs. Vanderbilt's only daughter. She had one son and one daughter by William K. Vanderbilt, and no children by Mr. Belmont.

So this marriage was forced on the girl because of the fact that Mrs. Belmont was still at the time of her great social ambitions and knew that a marriage of her daughter with nobility would reinforce all her power.

The Struggle to Mend

- Fry: I'd like to go into your life after the accident. Could you give us some idea what you had to go through to re-establish a certain peace of mind and tranquility?
- Field: Oh, such parts of one's life are difficult to put into concrete form. So much of emotion is so deep a running dark tide at such a time when you don't catch it, and if, as Wordsworth says, poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility," this certainly was no time in which I could write poetry, for there was no tranquility.

I think that I summed up some of the feeling in a letter to my very dear friend Thelma Wold, who lived at this time in Washington, where she had taken her degree in international law, and to her I had been accustomed to write very frequently when I was well. Evidently some time had gone by and I had been utterly unable to write to her. It wasn't as if I could have gotten up from the accident or come forth from it with my body unimpaired so that I could begin to take up some work. I was handicapped by the fact that my right leg had been very badly broken and I was in a cast, and when they took the cast off at the proper time it was found the wound had not healed, so the cast had to go back on after a very painful operation on the leg. I was in this way held up as a cripple in bed for so long that the brooding and lack of escape from emotion by doing any outside work made it much harder. I wrote to Thelma and said to her to forgive me for not writing:

You must feel me through the darkness, for I am sitting in a great darkness and silence and without power to speak. You know what my son was to me, or you know something of it. Every mother keeps part of her love and pride and hope hidden. He was everything a son could be and a thousand things more. I am reaching out for some faith, some hope, and my curse seems to be that nothing convinces me. There are whisperings and beams of light that come to me about the future after this weary life is past, but nothing of which I can be sure and take firm hold on.

I think I then spoke to her about her own contacts with him, so that she would know it wasn't just all a mother's pride and love. "I am so glad of your summer contact with Albert, Thelma. It was almost as if ordered. Don't you remember how I was always making arrangements that would bring you two together, and how he loved and admired you. You had an

Field: opportunity to see as few can what love and joy he spread wherever he went."

I could enlarge on this writing to say that I had never known anyone who was so long remembered after his death at so young years; he made an impression on people that you could scarcely describe, even on slight contact. He had a general love for humanity that was unusual in so young a person. I went with him one Christmas to do some shopping and saw that he was buying, on his own money which he always earned every summer, having a good job each time, a lace handkerchief. I don't suppose it was real lace but it looked very lacelike.

I said, "What in the world are you going to do with a lace handkerchief? Have you got a girl to give it to?"

He said, "Oh mother, no. There's such a dear old lady that lives around the corner and I don't think she gets very much at Christmas, and I heard her say that all her life she'd longed for a lace handkerchief."

That illustrates his outlook towards the elderly, and he had the same identification, I'm glad to say, with his own age. It wasn't any kind of maladjustment. He was not a boy that was very interested in sports, or let me say he wasn't conditioned to be a sportsman by, probably, his physical make-up, but he was so loved by the boys on the high school [football] team that they made him the doctor of the team so he'd have to go along with them to every game with his little first-aid kit and administer to any of them that was so unfortunate as to have an accident.

His understanding of my life was almost phenomenal. He said to me once, although he was one of the sufferers from my separation from my first husband, "I wouldn't respect you, Mother, if you came back to live with a man you didn't love." This was a touching illustration of his ability to think of principle beyond his own self interest, whereas my daughter, who was younger, wept and wept and asked me to please come back--being too young probably to see what Albert did--he was sixteen, I believe, at the time he said this to me, and could see it and was willing to take the consequences, though he told me there wasn't a day he didn't miss me.

The Appeal of Psychic Literature

Field: I think probably I turned at that time to the thought, a little, of what other mothers had done under such circumstances.

Fry: I was going to ask, Sara, if you found any resources outside yourself in the way of books you read or something like that?

Field: For the first time, my thoughts turned to books about psychic phenomena. Not having any religion to lean on, it seemed to me that there might be a supersensitive power, and though I am glad to say that a little later I did not depend on this at all any more, a great many people of far more intellectual power than I had were turning their thoughts toward psychic phenomena. There had been enormous losses in World War I; Sir Oliver Lodge had lost his only son Raymond and he said that he had contact with Raymond. He wrote a book called Raymond, which I read. I was a little put off by it because of its detailed information as to what was happening to Raymond, which was a little repulsive to me. For instance, they smoked cigars. But this is not fair for me to comment on because there were other things very moving in it.

It's been so many years since I read along that line that I remember more the things that I think put me off. But the most moving book I read at that time was written by a woman whose book was published by one of our best publishing houses here (I'll record that later when I get my hands on the book) and was written anonymously with the publisher's explanation at the front that they didn't usually publish a book of any kind, and particularly of this type, anonymously unless they knew the person well and had the utmost faith in her integrity. This was called Thy Son Liveth. It was the story of a mother whose son had been called into the service in World War I, for whose safety she had had no reason to fear any more than any other mother who knows her son is exposed in battle. Before her son went away he had taught her the Morse code on a set that was in his room, and she was in the habit of sitting in his room a great deal to read and think during his absence. One day as she sat in this room the code machine began to click, and knowing the code from her son she could gain from what it said:

"Don't worry, Mother, I am all right. Everything is all right." She was naturally somewhat startled at this, the first message she'd ever received or thought of receiving-- (No, I think I'm wrong on this. I think he said to her, "If I ever get a chance to send you a message, you'll know how to

Field: take it." And that was one of the reasons she did sit in the room.

About an hour or two later she was handed the usual telegram that the government sends out as soon as its losses are known, to say that her son had been killed in one of the most terrible of the battles of World War I. It was just at the hour, according to the telegram and other news of reference she had, at which she received this code message.

She wrote the whole story, of what their relationship had been and how it had culminated in this and how it had given her an absolute faith that he was able to send her a message that in death he was all right. I don't remember that she ever had any further communication with him, but the book was so beautifully written and so convincing, in a way, of her experience that no matter how much you might push it from yourself and say, "Well, I'd have to have an experience like that myself to really know there wasn't some other explanation," it was very readable, and I didn't feel about it as I did about Raymond. I felt it was more--although it was a much slighter book and certainly written by a woman of much less authority on psychic phenomena than Sir Oliver Lodge, [a woman] who had had a great friendship--there'd always been an understanding between them that they would exchange messages if possible after either one's death. I really remember that book more than others.

There were others I read at the time, one by Lambroso, who was a great French writer on psychic phenomena. I had been somewhat prepared for an approach, at least, to psychic phenomena by a book that I'd read years and years before. It was called The Unknown and written by no less than the great Flammarion, who was the leading astronomer of his day. He had collected material of a psychic nature which he felt came from reliable sources and tried to classify [them], believing that some day the subject would be looked into. It was scorned in that day by all scientific minds, as not even worthy of a second thought. But he had believed in it.

Fry: I remember Aldous Huxley was telling us about this the other day.

Field: Well, I don't wonder. He [Flammarion] had a really almost miraculous experience. His scientific friends were just horrified at his doing this [collecting psychic material], and he felt, as it were, called to do it, and he finished it. He supplied at least scientific organization, I'll say, because he saw there were different aspects to the psychic

Field: phenomena, and he wrote a preface in which he told this extraordinary story.

He spoke of the immense opposition to his writing on the part of his colleagues, and how he seemed unable to listen to them. He finished his book one afternoon and went out for a walk, and during his walk there came up one of those quick wind and thunderstorms that sometimes happen (I think of how I was in Paris one time and this happened, and caught me unaware without any umbrella or other protection). He had left his manuscript by an open window and he hadn't stapled it. When he came back there wasn't a single page of it left. It had all blown out the window. Well, he thought to himself, my friends were right; I wasn't destined to write this book-- because he didn't feel he could write it all over again. In fact, I presume he didn't have all that data any more. He thought rather sadly of this fact.

Well, every single page of that came back to him, almost like a miracle. People would hear [inaudible] page, which they picked up somewhere far away from where Flammarion lived, "It belongs to the great astronomer," and all the pages of that manuscript came back to him. So he later said that he was to publish it. [Laughs] The elements had brought him the evidence.

Well, I had read that book with great interest. I think I was always curious, especially about the things that men had done that took courage, and so I wasn't wholly unprepared to understand that there were those who believed that psychic phenomena were a reality. Of course, I lived to see these interesting experiments that are being made at Duke University in the supersensitive field, and that is very gratifying to me, although I still have never had experience with it that was convincing to me.

I tried it, and I got a lot of so-called responses, but I found it was a very dangerous thing; it almost unsettled my mind in a serious fashion. I never succeeded in doing anything but later on I would think I had gotten it at times and that led me to excesses in it, which as I say nearly unsettled my mind and I had to stop. But looking back at all that I thought came through, or might have come through, I feel so much of it must have come from wishful thinking and from my own subconscious mind, which was supplying just what it wanted to find.

Colonel Wood Leaves Portland

- Fry: I know that [Edwin R.] Bingham would want me to ask you more about what Erskine was doing at this time.
- Field: Of course, I have related that he was with us when the accident occurred, and that he had to be in the hospital quite a while. He had been hit in the back of the neck, but he had been able to, with that miraculous supply of super-strength which adrenalin can give, to climb this terribly steep hill and summon help, and then he collapsed himself and they took him to the hospital. But he rapidly recovered; he had a very strong constitution. My memory is that he didn't go back to Portland till after I was well on my feet again. I think I mentioned that, like the wonderful old bishop in Les Miserables, he would sit by my bed for hours and hours in silence, holding my hand, patient, suffering himself, but with a suffering that he could somewhat relieve with bodily activity. When I was put into Ross Hospital in Marin County he used to walk all the way from San Anselmo to Ross Hospital, sometimes twice a day--showing what wonderful physical strength he had, although he was then in his seventies.
- Finally--just when he had to go back to Portland to make final arrangements I can't remember, but he did have to for a while. But that wasn't until I had recovered and until we had made the move from the little eyrie, which was in that little half-house, to the large house on the corner of Broadway and Taylor, which we called the Flowering Wall because it had a great wall around it all hung with vines and blossoming flowers. We built on a study and a room which could contain our many books (which he had sent down from Portland), and then he did go back to Portland to make the final arrangements about his business, which was in a rather confused condition, and to see that his partnership was in good shape. His son had stepped in and taken his father's place, to a large degree. After that he came down permanently. His law office is still going on. His son, who is now in his eighties, is still practicing. This rugged structure of the body seems to be inherited, his Scotch-Irish inheritance.
- Fry: What happened to the social life of the colonel's wife when all of this took place? You mentioned that this was very important to her.
- Field: It was, and I think that it's a mercy that it was practically unchanged. Portland almost to a man was with her. We were very much disapproved of up there. It was one reason why I was

Field: very grateful that my husband could arrange to come down to California to stay, because he felt the coldness and hostility up there and he marveled that people who were honest about their relation could be so easily looked [down] upon, whereas the people who had the same relations but kept them under cover were approved of--and believe me my husband made a great deal of that in his [inaudible] in marvelous satirical fashion.

Fry: Well, he must have had the goods on a number of people up there too, Sara.

Field: He did have the goods on them, but he was not a man to exploit that, not at all. He simply would use it as he did satirically in general, as the law of society.

I wish I could adequately portray, though, the tenderness and concern he had for me all this time. Many men would have been jealous, even in death, of so high concentration as I was at that time making on thoughts of my boy and of what life meant to me to go on without him. I have never really expressed in a recording of this kind how much the children were in my life and how much they meant to me. I will say that, next to me, I don't believe anyone loved my boy more than Erskine did. He wrote a very beautiful poem to him, called "Endymion Dead," and he said in that that he was more than a son to him.

He [Albert] loved Erskine more than his own father, and that was part of the penetration that boy always had, as to where really great character lies. My former husband did really a good deal of rather ignoble persecution of me and of making much of the fact that God had wreaked his vengeance on me for my wicket conduct, and I was not by any means leaving Albert in a very happy home. My dear Erskine was so understanding of all this, so outraged by the fact that a man would try to hold a woman, get her back, as it were, when she had told him in plain words where her love and her desire for companionship lay.

And later he put detectives on me, which seemed to me ignoble. I have a letter that I wrote in connection with that that I sometimes think I will let you have to use as you will. It explains how he could have kept my friendship and even a kind of love, because he was the father of my children and that made a bond between us, but that the bond that means marriage had gone and he was unable to recognize that, cutting off any hope then that there could ever be even ordinary respect on my part for a man who would put detectives on the mother of his children.

Fry: What was he trying to prove?

- Field: That Erskine and I were living together.
- Fry: That wasn't very hard to prove, was it?
- Field: Not at all.
- Fry: He was in Berkeley at this time, wasn't he?
- Field: Yes. He'd been called to the Thousand Oaks Baptist Church here in Berkeley.
- Fry: And at the time of his hiring detectives you were in San Francisco?
- Field: We lived in San Francisco.
- Fry: You already had your divorce?
- Field: Yes, but he wanted me back in spite of it. He had thought that Albert's death would bring me back; he was that emotional type. If he could have only known it, it made me realize more than ever how necessary it was--and I was always comforted by the remark my son had made, "I'd never have respected you if you'd gone back to my father."
- Fry: What was Erskine doing, since his recovery was much quicker than yours? Was he writing poetry?
- Field: Yes; in all his able years he was never, you might say, apart from creative work. I can't remember just exactly what things he was writing at that time, but he did write, and also he had much business to attend to, a very great deal. You don't make a break away from a long-held profession and from the obligations that he seriously felt he owed his wife and children. He wanted to secure their [inaudible] fully and all this takes much more work than one can indicate in just passing over it.
- Fry: It was really a period of great adjustment?
- Field: Yes, a very great adjustment for him, indeed it was. One of the wonderful things was, he was always trying to show his former wife how being in love with a woman in your mature years, because you find full communication with her, didn't dissipate or dispel the love you had for the woman who had shared your early life and had been the mother of your children, but her pride was too badly hurt.

He told her that, in some letters, he said, "I don't respect merely hurt pride. Hurt love is another thing, and

Field: that's what I want to assure you you still have from me, the love and affection of a dear friend."

He never all through the rest of her life--I've forgotten how many years we lived together before she died--he never neglected her in any of those ways that showed how much she was still in his thought. He'd send her up from California all kinds of luxuries and delicious things that you couldn't get in Oregon, constantly. And for a while, I think only once or twice, he would go home for the holidays, but he always wrote her to say that while he was coming home, he was coming home as her friend, not as her husband. She steadily, of course, refused divorce. He did ask, because as the years went on there was sometimes great inconvenience because of it, but she never would grant it.

She died many years before Erskine died, and I will tell you about what happened then.

[end of interview]

XXVII LIFE BEGINS AGAIN

[June 19, 1962]

Protests Against the War

- Fry: Sara, could you give an idea of how long it was before you could take an active part in the world again?
- Field: I would say it was probably the better part of a year, because there were all of six months when I was in first one cast and then taken out of that and had an operation on the leg and put into another cast, and then when that was taken off I had to be on crutches for quite awhile until the leg grew strong. So I think it was the better part of a year. I would say, in other words, from the time of the accident, which was in October 1918, until well along into the summer of 1919, probably.
- Fry: In the meantime, the war was going on, and in your peace activities you were able to do some things just to express your opposition to the war. What did you do? A man can be a conscientious objector, but what can a woman do?
- Field: Well, of course, I had made a speech that had attracted considerable attention before the war, or when the war was imminent.
- Fry: How did you help the conscientious objectors themselves?
- Field: Oh, we couldn't really help them in any way of gaining their freedom. They were committed for a certain time for their conscientious objection, but we got permission to go over to see them, and we could take them small luxuries like cigarettes and fruit, at Alcatraz. They were all confined in Alcatraz. There was one young professor from Wisconsin University there; I wish I could remember his name. He was

Field: a young, red-headed, resolute person who was taking that hard, terribly austere life over there with equanimity, and feeling it was a far greater privilege to do that [than] to have been exposed to the horrors of war to which he held unalterable opposition. And [there were] two or three others who were not quite so marked in character as to make the deep impression this young man did, but were fine fellows.

As I remember it, we made several trips on the launch that took you over to Alcatraz. Just why we were given the privilege--because not everybody was--of seeing them, I don't know, but I think it may have been because my husband had been a West Point man and had been also a very famous lawyer, and he had all kinds of prestige on which to draw. But the fact is that we did see them, and that's all we could do for them.

Fry: Did you work for the Red Cross or do any auxiliary work?

Field: No. It was at this time that I read a book by [Bertrand] Russell, who said that even to take part in those humane aspects of war was aiding the war. It was very hard not to give to the Red Cross, or to any other organization that sought to alleviate the agonies of war, but everything one did at that time in opposition to the war was fraught with suffering, and so I didn't. I spoke constantly, at least to people [I met], about my opposition. I heard, though never confirmed this, that my phone was tapped because of their suspicion that I was working in opposition to the war. I never made that kind [of opposition]. I only made the constitutional opposition that we are allowed, of free speech, and therefore I never evidently committed any kind of breach that subjected me to imprisonment, though I was perfectly willing to have that happen if necessary.

After having protested [any] war at all before it was declared, I think it was then that the People's Council was organized. It was composed of conscientious objectors everywhere, who were not in prison--it was only the young men subject to draft that were, of course, imprisoned, and a few people who showed violent opposition in some way, [who] committed acts of violence I mean. But this [Council] was composed of people who insisted on expressing their opposition to war as a means of solving any international problem. I can see that it was the beginning of my own later intense interest in what is now growing so fast, this idea that the only way to solve war is government under an international law and with international control. But that idea hadn't been advanced at that time, except as it had been thought of in the League of Nations, or was thought of in the League of

Field: Nations, which Wilson failed so sadly in.

Fry: Did the People's Council as an organization interest itself in forwarding the cause of international government?

Field: No. It hadn't really been proposed in the form it has now. They did back it in the form of the League of Nations; they were a thousand percent for that. My husband was skeptical of the efficacy of the League of Nations without an adequate police force, which they didn't supply and which we still don't have [in the UN].

[As I have told you] we went to several cities, but everywhere except in Chicago we weren't allowed to speak. We were denied any place to speak whatsoever. We didn't get as far as New York; we stopped in Kansas City, where we were refused, and then Detroit, and then, I think, from there we went to Chicago. We had failed in both the other places, and we found that more and more resolutions were being taken that if we appeared all doors would be closed to us, and, in some way inexplicable to me, the whole People's Council just dissolved. They didn't have the money, for one thing. Traveling about so was expensive, and while some of us tried to pay our own expenses we couldn't do it. We didn't have enough money to do it, to stay in hotels and then be frustrated. It was felt that the money could be spent in better ways where there would be more success.

Fry: So you just disbanded and everyone went to other organizations?

Field: Oh, we all belonged to other organizations. I'm sure that at this time I belonged to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF], though I can't remember the date on which I joined it, because I had previously been a member of Mrs. Oswald Garrison Villard Senior's organization, called the Women's Peace [Party]. It was not international the way Jane Addams' league was. It was just national. She [Mrs. Villard] had a home just out of New York along the Hudson River.

Fry: And they had a San Francisco chapter, is that right?

Field: I don't think they did, and I think that was probably why I joined the [Women's International League], also without dropping this other membership. That body [the Women's Peace Party] dissolved on Mrs. Oswald Garrison Villard's death. (You understand this was Mrs. Oswald Garrison Villard Senior? It was her son who was the noted editor and founder of The Nation.)

Fry: Did the Women's Peace Party serve as a sort of lecture bureau?

- Field: Not, it was rather old-fashioned, Chita. I think probably one reason that I, a young and more forward-looking soul, felt the need of joining a stronger organization was that it just met in meetings and talked about peace--to each other, like a ladies' sewing society or something. I didn't feel at home very much in it.
- Fry: So then you went to WILPF?
- Field: Yes. And, of course I have since joined many others that have sprung up since the nuclear bombing of later years began.
- Fry: Was WILPF very strong out here on the coast at first?
- Field: It grew slowly, and it's pretty strong now. There's a chapter here in Berkeley.
- Fry: Was Kathleen Norris in it?
- Field: Yes, and Gertrude Atherton. I know she was in it, too.
- Fry: What did WILPF do at first? It was more propagandistic?
- Field: Yes, and its international quality was intriguing because no women of the world have suffered more from the ravages of war than European women, and to get them lined up in an organization that would work for peace was extraordinarily important. I think I have told how I fought to get our Woman's Party to become such a peace organization. That came later. Please remind me to tell you about that, because that was after the states had ratified the memo.
- Fry: Were you already in WILPF at that time?
- Field: It's very hard for me to say, darling. I've joined so many organizations in the course of my life that I can't say at what date I joined that. It seems to me I must have been.

Democratic National Convention, 1920

- Fry: In 1920 the Democrats held their convention in San Francisco. You and Erskine must have been involved in that?
- Field: Yes, we were very much involved. We wanted so much to know all that was going on, and therefore we applied to the various labor unions that were known to us, to write news stories and

Field: interviews about the convention, and we were accepted and got into the press group.

Fry: What were you reporting for, Sara?

Field: We were reporting for several labor papers, which have practically passed out or become completely Communist, but in that day were just, you might say, liberally socialistic under the Democratic order. Many of them (I think the People's World has gone all-out Communist) exist; others just faded out because they didn't have enough support from a liberal wing of labor that was not Communist. But there were a great number in that day; I think at least six papers carried our stories. We didn't give reports that had to be telegraphed in. In fact, I doubt if the labor papers could have afforded that anyway, but we did have the opportunity, which is what we wanted, of hearing everything that went on at that convention.

It was a very exciting convention because we knew it was Bryan's last chance to win.

Fry: Did Erskine want Bryan?

Field: No, he did not, but he had once wanted him.

Fry: Did either of you have a favorite candidate that you wanted to see nominated?

Field: I haven't a doubt that deep in our hearts as between [James Cox] and Bryan we would rather have seen Bryan get it, but we wouldn't be wholehearted about it because by this time Bryan had become a very bigoted and narrow-minded man in many fields of thought. He and Erskine had once agreed greatly in the old days of free silver when he [Bryan] made his famous cross-of-gold speech--that was at a former Democratic convention [1896] where Erskine had made a wonderful speech and Bryan was younger then and full of fire and vigor and certainly for the underdog, and I don't think he could have lost all that entirely.

But if we had been intensely for Bryan instead of probably just temperately so, it would have made more impression on my mind than it has left now. So much has happened since, the Depression following and the terrible corruption under Harding that went on, the Teapot Dome scandal, and also I think we tried to be pretty dispassionate in our reports.

Fry: You were watching everybody.

- Field: We were watching everybody.
- Fry: That was the convention that had 44 ballots.
- Field: Oh yes, ballot after ballot; it took just hours for the nomination to be accomplished.
- Fry: Do you remember any other writers there, Sara?

Notable Visitors

- Field: Yes, I remember that Edna Ferber was there and came up to our house. I had a dinner. Oh yes, William Allen White was there, and he brought Edna Ferber to our house for dinner. It was my unpleasant duty to tell Miss Ferber from the first that I had unfortunately not read any of her novels, but I admired her as a person, which I surely did because she had the courage of her convictions always, from first to last. I thought it would come out sooner or later, my ignorance of her writing, and I was not an avid reader of the popular novel. (I didn't read, in later years, but one of Sinclair Lewis's novels, and I feel that while they made a certain temporary impression on society they were not that kind of literature that one feels has the mark of endurance in it, and there was too much else that was important to read.) But I didn't want any misunderstanding, to have her say anything about such-and-such a character in her book and expect a response from me, so I felt it was necessary to tell her right at the first that I hadn't read any of her books.
- Fry: What sort of person was she?
- Field: She was very animated and interesting. She brought her mother with her, which I liked. They were very Jewish in looks and manner. Later, Edna had an operation done on her nose to make it look Grecian, and it changed her looks very much, but I sort of resented that. I liked her to be just what she was. She had an extravagant admiration for the Barrymore family and she, I think, wanted to look just the way they did.
- Fry: What was William Allen White like?
- Field: Oh, he was extremely informative, genial, broad in his vision. He was the one man who was really trying to reform the Republican Party and to make it realize that it was losing its vitality by having no liberalism in its programs at all. This of course

Field: interested Erskine very much, and also showed how open our house was to all views, because I think nearly all the people that came up to see us at that time were Republicans, as I remember it, possibly with the exception of Marion Reedy of Reedy's Mirror. He came up, and I shall never in my life forget that experience, because it was brave of him to come.

He had to climb many stairs and he had heart trouble, and I said, "Why, Mr. Reedy, if I'd know that I would have urged you not to come."

And he said, "It would have been in vain. I always do the thing that I feel will bring me profit and pleasure without regard to my heart."

And two or three days later he was dead of heart failure.

But that night he sat in Erskine's leather chair and filled it--he was a great bulky man of perfectly joyous Irish quality, and his knowledge of folk songs was inexhaustible. He had a pretty good voice, and he sat in this armchair and sang to us songs of all periods from way back in the revolutionary days right straight up through "A Bicycle Built for Two," which was popular at this time.

Fry: Did you talk politics?

Field: We talked politics to a certain degree, but I think mostly literature. His magazine was really devoted to bringing out the still unknown people in whom he felt he detected genius.

Fry: Erskine had met him in New York?

Field: Yes, at former conventions, and this time I think he too with his paper was in the press section. I had a couple of poems published in the Mirror, and my memory [is that] the evening was spent on talking about writers and the new poetry movement which was then just under way--imagism and free verse, loosening the stern bonds of poetry.

I said to him, "I might never write free verse, but at least a woman could say things that weren't shocking and that were true about life without having to express it in the niceties of Mrs. Browning."

And he was very delighted at that; he said, "That's a freeing of it too, just as much as writing in a freer meter."

Fry: Reedy was very much involved in the movement?

Field: Oh, very much involved in the movement, yes. As I say, he was the first, I think, to publish Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology, which later had an enormous sale.

Fry: Masters visited you about this time?

Field: It was after the convention that he came. He wasn't at the convention at all. He was a lawyer in Chicago; he had been a partner of Darrow's at one time, and then they separated and he went on his own. Later, a very disillusioned and bitter man, he died in almost poverty, in a rather squalid hotel in New York, supported largely by people who knew he had been, or was, a great poet and contributed to him. His ending was rather said.

Fry: You said that when he visited you you felt this was a sort of turning point in his life.

Field: Yes, I did. I'd rather tape that up a little later, if you don't mind.

[end of interview]

XXVIII THE RISE AND FALL OF A DREAM

[June 28, 1962]

A School for Theater Arts

Fry: You and Erskine started a school for the art of theater in San Francisco. What gave you the idea for starting such a school?

Field: Because the rather famous [Cornish] school of the theater in Seattle was, for lack of financial support, closing down. It had been organized and was supervised by a remarkable woman named [inaudible] Cornish. It became a famous school, to which people interested in the dramatic arts came from all quarters of the country and certainly [from] west of the Mississippi, those who didn't choose to go to New York, where I suppose there were plenty of dramatic schools. This was the only one in the West.

My husband and I had been very deeply interested in dramatic art, which was just beginning to develop all over the country. We were fortunate to have in San Francisco, at the time that we resolved to see if we could do something about starting a school, Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg Browne, who usually went by just her maiden name, Ellen Van Volkenburg. They had taught in the Cornish school and previous to that had established a little theater in Chicago which became really world famous. It produced some of the most remarkable plays that had been given up to that time in the country, foreign plays and very choice plays written by European authors. They had become known as the father and mother of the little theater movement. From the time they established that it was so successful that little theater movements began to spring up here and there.

It seemed to us that San Francisco--being a large city and with a chance of drawing students for the school from as

Field: many corners as the Cornish school had done--that we should really use the great experience of the Brownes and others who were in our region to establish a school that not only would teach actors and the idea of drama but that would encourage the writing of drama and those enterprises connected with the stage such as painting sets, and electrical equipment, and costume-making. In other words, it was to be literally a school of the arts of the theater, because we considered every part of what went into the performance of a successful drama an art, and the person doing it as an artist who had to adjust to the whole dramatic form.

Fry: At this point, there didn't seem to be any dramatic departments in colleges and universities?

Field: There was very little activity. There was a little theater over here in Berkeley, of which Everett Glass was director, and later was, I think, pushed out of what he could do very well by Sam Hume. But there was very little, you might say, wide activity, and certainly nothing on the scope of this school, so my husband and I both set about trying to raise funds to back this school. We found very great difficulty in approaching the wealthy. They almost all would tell us that they had other commitments and they seemed not at all to see its possibilities. This was just previous to the Great Depression; we had a little more certainly than we had later, and we resolved that we would take it out of our capital to prove to the people of San Francisco, for at least two years if necessary, that such a school was possible.

Now there were, within the region, some famous people in the drama. Hedwiga Reicher was one. She was the daughter of the great [Emanuel] Reicher of Germany, who had done some very remarkable dramatic work. He had brought his beautiful daughter--she was extremely beautiful--over to play the [Gerhart] Hauptmann plays in New York (he [Hauptmann] wrote a number of most significant plays whose titles I can give you later). One of them was called The Weavers and was a play that was built around the terrific upheaval that industrial changes brought to England [Silesia]. It was played very successfully in New York. But Mr. Reicher died and Hedwiga drifted out to the Coast, getting one opportunity after another. The manager who was going to back her in some big productions in New York went down on the Titanic, and all her prospects for a further career went down with him. And so she came to the Coast and was teaching drama, or at least had organized a little dramatic school over here on this side of the bay in, I think, Oakland. I had met her in New York when she was the rage of New York. She had come over, as I say, a very beautiful girl, with this famous father, and my husband and I went to a luncheon in New York at which we met her and had

Field: been fascinated by her. So when we heard she was out on the Coast we enlisted her services and those of Irving Pichel, who was rising in fame as an actor in this region, and also of Rudolph Schaeffer, who still has a school of design in San Francisco. He must be quite an old man now; I haven't seen him in years, though I get all his announcements faithfully. He has a rather important school of design which I think is backed by a lot of very wealthy women in San Francisco.

Of course the leading spirits were the Brownes. Who else have you [listed] besides those I've named?

Fry: I read the pamphlet on your school [San Francisco School of the Arts of the Theater], which Bancroft has. It mentioned that you expected to have some guest lecturers and teachers in the future, such as Hettie Louise Mick with puppetry, John Cowper Powys, Sam Hume, and Charles Erskine Scott Wood.

Field: Oh yes. Well, we did have those plans, and I think one of my husband's plays was given, a very beautiful one-act play called Odysseus. It was given in extremely modern style, with a minimum of stage furniture of any kind, and it was a successful play.

Fry: Did the theater adjoin the school?

Field: We had a theater and a school all in one, in a rented building.

Fry: I understand it was one that Sam Hume had begun, the theater, and that your school and Hume's theater more or less merged.

Field: Yes. But it was under the directorship of the Brownes. I don't remember that we had very much traffic with Sam Hume. He seemed to have early disappeared from the picture. I think he came over to the dramatic department over here [at the University] and became more important, and he was director of that.

Fry: And the Greek Theater, yes, at the University.

Field: Well, we successfully demonstrated to the people of San Francisco what could be done with young and vigorous talent. The [school] produced some very beautiful plays and the public attended, but still there wasn't the money to back it.

Fry: No support from other contributors?

Field: No. Little piddling sums only, and there were all these people

Field: to whom salaries had to be paid (they had to live) and all the other expenses connected with the school. Of course, we got a certain amount from the tuition fees, and they [students] began to come, just as we knew they would, from different parts of the country. There was one girl whose name I can't remember who really showed unusual, amazing talent. Her depiction of Ophelia in Hamlet was memorable, and she had a really great future ahead of her when the school collapsed and she had to go back to her home in the Middle West.

The school really had such possibilities that to this day I can't help but feel a kind of bitterness in my heart that the wealth of San Francisco didn't rise and see what it would have done for San Francisco. It would have placed it on the map, as a unique institution in a unique city. But we didn't have the means to go on after two years and it just folded up.

Fry: Did you get many small contributions from a broad base of the population?

Field: No, not a broad base. We got some contributions of a nature that was small in relation to the wealth from which it came. As I say, what with tuition and our own real sacrifice for the school--because it was [a sacrifice]; we never after that had as much income because we took a large sum out of our capital. But our faith was so strong that San Francisco would rise with a demonstration of what it could do that it was a very worthwhile investment.

Fry: Did you help campaign for funds?

Field: Oh yes, I did. I went about soliciting funds from those whose names were given to me, and I also gave hospitality to the Brownes for a good while so that they didn't have to have independent expenses. I did all that I could to aid and abet an institution in which I couldn't take an active part myself, because I wasn't a dramatist of any kind, but I cared about it.

Fry: Maurice Browne in his autobiography called Too Late to Lament tells of two very wealthy San Franciscans in an office (and he doesn't give their correct names) who agreed to give something like \$25,000 apiece to the school if Erskine would match it, and he said that a few months later the matching funds appeared from an anonymous donor, so everyone raced back up to the offices of these two gentlemen and they denied ever having made the offer.

Field: I wouldn't like to put them on record. Yes, I know who they were. But I understand why Walter [Morris] Hart, for instance,

Field: doesn't want to tell things about the University because he said he couldn't speak fully unless he had to say some harsh things about people, and I don't care to put that in. The fact that it happened is true, but I don't care to put them on record as to names, because their descendants are friends of mine and I wouldn't like to leave behind me an unkind--

Fry: Well, perhaps the names aren't as important as the fact that it did happen and there was this great difficulty in getting the wealthy people to support it.

Field: We never could understand it, and I think it really--I can't say broke my husband's heart, because he had too stout a heart to be broken by anything, but it left a scar on him, because many of these people to whom he went had been his friends and some had even been clients. His law interests, while centered in Portland all his life, had interests here in California that were extended into Oregon and so he knew some of these people as clients as well as friends and he had won large cases for them. There was one family particularly [for whom] he had managed the affairs of the Anglo-London Bank, which in some way extended into Portland, and he had looked to the members of that staff to help him out in this great enterprise, which he didn't feel was personal at all.

Fry: But all his plans fell on barren ground?

Field: Yes. They all felt they had committed themselves to as much money as they wanted to give away.

Fry: Were these all people of Erskine's age?

Field: No. Most of them I would say were younger. They were saving it to invest and make more money. Monied people are never satisfied with what they have. It always calls for increase.

Fry: I think it becomes an art they want to practice.

Field: Oh, you're kind. It becomes a mania.

Fry: I was interested that you also had a children's department in this school.

Field: Yes, we did have a children's department, and that was given over to teaching ballet. I can't remember who was in charge of ballet. You must remember that I was recovering still from the accident and all this period while I tried to make life a forward thing instead of backward looking, still my memory is clouded in regard to details because I was really under the fog

Field: of all that happened and because of the fact that it was very difficult yet for me to get around easily.

Fry: Did you more or less give the Volkenburgs free rein?

Field: The Brownes, you mean? Van Volkenburg was her name, but they were usually known as the Brownes. In those days they hadn't been divorced. She still carries the Browne on her name for business and social purposes, though she's known as Ellen Van Volkenburg in the world of the theater, in which she became finally a very prominent person alone and produced plays all by herself in London. She produced Othello with Paul Robeson, on her own, in London, and it was a great success.

Fry: She must have been very talented.

Field: Oh, she is very talented. She is to come here this winter.

Everything happened so swiftly. The theater was established and the school was established, and we were busy financing it largely, and then it collapsed with the aegis of such two as you speak of and others who had more or less promised to give and then felt they couldn't. Now it's like a dream in my mind, a dream of something that you really saw could happen and that the lack of funds prevented from happening.

Fry: Was there any thought of making this a city school?

Field: Oh no, nothing of that kind. We wanted to keep it independent. There wasn't as much government control generally in those days, and we had no itch for it.

Memorable People of the Theater

Fry: I would like to ask you about some of the people who were associated with it. Perhaps you could tell us something about Maurice Browne himself and what it was like to work with him? Was he rather difficult?

Field: Extremely difficult. Like all perfectionists he had a perfectionist complex, and I don't suppose there's anything harder to work with. He had a certain sadistic side to him, which of course (like most of our difficulties that we haven't recognized) was unconscious, and he would make girls stand as caryatides, holding, for hours sometimes, their arms [up] and they would faint. I won't say hours, but for much longer periods than anybody can bear to

Field: do that. He had a perfectionist picture of what he wanted to achieve on the stage and he drove his artists to it, with a kind of almost ferocity. So he was difficult to work with, and he was very susceptible to women.

We had learned to love Ellen very dearly and our hearts ached when finally, while they were still in San Francisco, even after the collapse of the theater, he married a girl that he had met in Seattle because she was going to have a baby and he wanted to legitimize the child. I think he tells about that in his book.

Fry: Yes, he did, quite frankly.

Field: He became so famous by extending that play (which wasn't being given anything more than superficial attention) called Journey's End, that came out after World War I--it was the greatest play emerging from World War I. It was just being given ordinary playings here and there, but Maurice Browne made it world famous. He by that time had gone to London, back to England, which was his home, and Ellen Van Volkenburg had gone too, because, while they were divorced, she had the kind of sense of their affinity in the theater movement, which they certainly did have.

They worked beautifully together in that, and she was so large in her spirit that she could endure, probably with great pain, all his defections from her. They never lost their desire or their success in producing plays together. I think she was a wonderful balance to him. She too required the highest kind of workmanship but not in the same manner that he did. She may have driven just as hard in her own way but it didn't seem like that kind of driving. People can do that, you know; they can bring the best out of a person by firmness and understanding but not always with harshness.

Fry: One of his major limitations was the terrible rages he would go into.

Field: Yes, he would go into absolutely uncontrollable rages, and that wasn't of course very conducive to a good spirit among his students. But he produced great plays. He was a master at it; there's no doubt about it.

Fry: Maybe you can tell us something about Sam Hume.

Field: No, I can tell you almost nothing about Sam Hume. I've seen him once or twice in late years and he's as much of an enigma to me now as he was when I first saw him, and as I say he soon

Field: disappeared from the scene, in relation to the school of the theater. We had very little contact. I think I also resented the fact that he more or less elbowed his way into his position in regard to Everett Glass, who I thought was a very fine director.

He was so good a director that in days before we had the school of the theater we had come all the way across the bay, which was not easy in those days, and especially for my husband, and had sat in the Greek Theater and in the little theater to see some of the plays that he produced. I think he was the first to bring over Chekhov's plays, for instance. I saw The Cherry Orchard under Everett Glass at the little theater. It was there I saw Irving Pichel. He married the daughter of the then quite famous socialist mayor of Berkeley, her first name was Violet, and she was an excellent actress, too. We hadn't been out very long but we knew about him [the mayor], of course. I think it was more or less under his rule of the city that the excellent standard of police that we have here was established and became famous. They have to be college graduates, don't they?

Fry: Yes. I think he really reformed that. Did Irving Pichel stay here in the area for a while?

Field: Yes, until he got a very much better offer from Hollywood, and he went down into moving pictures.

Fry: Did you have any contact with William Dallam Armes? He was in Berkeley a little before your time; I thought he might still be around.

Field: I don't remember his name at all.

Fry: Well, he was the first Greek Theater man and knew the Brownes very well. They knew him and admired him greatly.

Field: Well, he probably knew them in connection with their work at the Cornish school and especially in Chicago. I could wish you had been born then to have seen the kind of work they did in Chicago. I presume that all the people that I once knew who knew of their work are gone now, but they said that it ruined them for ordinary theater; it was so beautiful and perfect in every degree that they always left the performances at the little theater in Chicago feeling in the deepest sense of the word that they had seen great art.

Fry: How did they feel about this theater in San Francisco?

- Field: Well, of course the equipment wasn't what they had had [in Chicago]. The Chicago people had responded very well to the little theater movement under the Brownes and had given enough money to them to build a beautiful little theater, in which was all the then modern equipment. That they didn't have here.
- Fry: I believe you had plans to have one designed.
- Field: Oh, we had all kinds of plans, my dear Chita. I can't tell you how much we expected this school to just become one of the greatest institutions of the West Coast.
- Fry: There was a slight depression about this time, in the early twenties. Do you think people were scared of donating money? Of course, at the same time they were giving thousands of dollars to build the stadium here in Berkeley.
- Field: Exactly. [But] it [the depression of the early twenties] didn't leave the mark on the world that the great depression did.
- [end of interview]

XXIX THE WOMAN'S PARTY, PEACE, AND RELIGION

[July 12, 1962]

"Animus" versus "Anima"

Fry: Would you like to add anything to our discussion of Mrs. Belmont and her life among her wealthy friends?

Field: Well, what I would like to say is more subjective than objective. Rather than come home puffed up with any kind of importance because I had been among the great and the near great in their world of wealth but not in thought, I was extremely depressed. It is probably why the writing that I did in the month following was not lively or as interesting as I think I could have made it, as I had not been living perhaps under the remembrance of the vivid life I lived in San Francisco, meeting poets and musicians and scholars and people of that kind who flocked into my little high flat of the half-house before my husband joined me and we moved into the large house on the corner of Broadway and Taylor.

I think I was wise enough at that age to realize how insignifiant in the realities wealth really was, and not only insignificant but inimical to people's development and growth. They [people of wealth] had a sense of power without using that power constructively, except in Mrs. Belmont's case, where she really had, without resigning in any way her social position and giving a great deal of her life to the social activities, she really had a desire, probably from her will to power, to perform the work which she did for women, and it is not to be despised by any means. It is only to be seen not perhaps as a great self-giving for its own sake, the way I had been used to in associating with so many young women who left college to do it, who gave up careers to do it; it is only in that way that I get a perspective on her motives. But perhaps I have no right to look into motives, only into results, and the results were good. She was a force throughout all the

Field: effort for national suffrage. I think she had dreams of being president one day; she believed ardently that some day we would have a woman president.

I hardly can see how, with the antagonisms of time against women, she could have thought of it in her own day, but possibly we will someday, for women are growing in power. But inevitably, and I say this as an ardent suffragist, there is a line between what I think is men's world and women's world, in this sense, that men's minds, as Jung knows, being what he called "the representative of the animus" as against the anima (the soul) of life, are formed to take in all the immensity of complexities that underlie politics and the balance between politics and the human heart. I think woman's place will probably always be, as let us say in the present administration, of very great help, perhaps almost unwritten help, such as Mrs. Kennedy is able to give her husband by her fluency in languages and her veneration of our American ideals and her restoration of the White House, to emphasize all that American history stands for. I may be very wrong in this, and the more masculine-minded women will not like that, but I still feel that C. G. Jung, who at the time of his death was considered the most learned man on the face of the earth, is right in feeling that the very nature of the psychology of men and women demands this type of cooperation. It doesn't by any means mean that woman should ever be pushed into an inferior place; I think she should feel that it's a superior place. She supplies the soul of whatever man does, and certainly that is something to be reckoned with.

Fry: Do you think there was any evidence during the suffrage campaign of women who could have this sense of the immensity of complexities in politics that you speak of for men?

Field: I think so, and I think even Alice Paul, who had one of the keenest and probably most, what we would call, masculine minds of any of the women in the party, recognized it. But, also, right along with that mind (which women need too because we need a balance between the animus and the anima), she felt that whatever political positions women might hold in the future, their main and greatest contribution would be in what I loosely call the spiritual life of the nation. That is why I was surprised that she wasn't with me more in my later advocacy that the party should be given over to peace, which was the saving of life and not the destruction of it.

Fry: At any rate, when you came home you realized there was this gulf between people who had the power to do things but failed to realize--

Field: Failed in most instances to do it, and even in Mrs. Belmont's case the unbalance between her anima and her animus was so great that while she was seeking power in the political world she couldn't keep what I would call a joyous and loving relationship in her own home. Of course, Mr. Belmont was long dead, but among the servants there was immense quarreling and unrest and dissatisfaction, and the feeling of the mansion--because it wasn't a home, it was a mansion--was not one of balanced quiet.

Fry: What did you mean when you said you felt that this class of people, this economic class--

Field: They were a class, the four hundred, which is rapidly dying. We still have the wealthy but not that little group that considered themselves greater than all.

Fry: You said you felt they were an anomaly.

Field: They were an anomaly in society; they spent vast sums in a world of great needs. They spent it on debuts for their daughters and all kinds of balls and receptions, so that it had to be more or less hidden from the public, how much they were spending, because as Mr. Choate said, "The rich must set an example to the poor." Well, the rich could hardly set an example to the poor. He was probably one of the wittiest men who ever entered the law, and very razorlike in his keen judgments. He was constantly advising at least Mr. Belmont and presumably his other wealthy clients always on this line, from what Mrs. Belmont told me. She had, by the way, the utmost respect for him.

I don't know whether I said that in her will (showing that to the end her deep interest was in suffrage) she left enough money to establish the Alva Belmont Memorial House, which was to be used for the benefit of women, and, particularly at the time she died, in furtherance of the laws to equalize women's rights with men's in the various states. They were very unequal.

Fry: Was that a term of the will?

Field: Well, I don't know; that I can't answer. I know it was established to further the advancement of women.

The Woman's Party, Washington, 1920

Fry: The reason I asked is that I believe after the final ratification of the suffrage amendment you were able to go to Washington for the final convention, for you, of the Woman's Party. But before that, the amendment was made final August 26, 1920. Did you take part in any special celebration?

Field: No, I did not. It now comes back to me that I was asked to come to Washington to take part in it, but I was still both in body and mind not able to participate in public events. I remember now the great rejoicing, but life had become to me at that time something that was different from merely doing. One must see what the doing was all about and whither it led, and I was in a state of almost perpetual meditation over my first impact with death. My father had died before, but he hadn't meant too much in my life, so that death never had struck me until it struck something dearest to my heart, and part of the heart went with it. I couldn't put my heart into any speeches for a long time. I think it was largely on that basis that I refused to come east, but I remember now the letter begging me to come and my refusal letter.

Fry: Would you like to tell us what happened in the convention after the victory? What shape did the party take?

Field: Of course, not being there, it is not very detailed in my mind. I only know, and largely on inference, looking back, that they must have laid the plans for the continuation of the Woman's Party under the program which they adopted, because when I got there I had the feeling, alas, of a kind of caucus that was so preordained and prearranged that all the words that would be said against the program adopted would be in vain. I didn't know this until later, but it came out as very evident later on.

Fry: Your own protest would have been in vain?

Field: Yes, I came on to make a speech, the speech that dedicated the bust to Congress. I'd finally gotten well enough and with my husband's full permission, for we had finally gotten our lives together, he urged my going on to do this. I took my little daughter Katherine with me. She was then fifteen years old and very impressionable, and she made friends on the train with some of the other women that were going. I remember Mrs. William Kent, Senior, particularly; Kay was much impressed that Mrs. Kent, all the way out, was studying French, and as she herself had been studying French she felt quite en rapport with Mrs. Kent.

Field:

Now we come to that last convention of the Woman's Party. I went on utterly unaware of what I have just said, that during the period between the passage of the amendment in August 1920 and February 15, 1921, a great deal of discussion and thought must have been going on and decisions reached that allowed for no discussion of policy. It was to be put through evidently as rigidly as any political party ever has done in its own convention. My one thought after World War I was this: I had said to every group of the hundreds to which I had spoken for national suffrage that women would be a very great influence in the peace movement of the world, and my whole being was filled with that thought as I traveled east.

It [the convention] was held in the rotunda of the capitol, in which the acoustics are atrocious. You hear your voice coming back to you from every angle. But nevertheless [we went ahead]. There was first a very beautiful pageant, largely of younger women (for we had a great number of younger women in the party) who were dressed in the gold and blue, I think it was, of our party colors. They wove in and out and about the rotunda and had some demonstration on the street. Then we gathered in this rotunda, and here is where a rather amusing little incident occurred, which comes back to me with a kind of poignancy. My daughter, though only fifteen years old, had become intensely interested in the movement and believed, as I did, in feminist ideas. When we came to the capitol building and I saw the vast crowd and I was told that I was to be taken up in front to sit with Jane Addams and Speaker [Frederick Huntington] Gillett, who was going to respond on behalf of Congress, I put her in the hands of some friends that I thought would be careful of her and guide her in, for she was completely bewildered, having never been in Washington before and the capitol being a rather immense and frightening affair to her. Evidently she got lost from them and she lost the entranceway of where to come in, and finally, after asking a few guides and much perturbation on her part, she found her way in through the entrance that led in front of the rostrum, where curtains were hung, and in which the speakers were brought through. The meeting was just about to begin when, terrified and tired, this little figure--because she was little, came through and said in quite a loud voice, "Oh, Mother, I thought I had lost you!" And so she too sat in the front row with me, and I feel very happy to think that to this day she is a loyal feminist who got lost, perhaps, in the crowd, but never got lost in her thoughts as to the injustice of treating women as an inferior sex.

Address to the Convention

- Field: Well, we met in that bedecked capitol rotunda, and there I had the feeling that the future all lay before us and there was so much for women to do. I gave an address which I think was not wholly pleasing to the powers that that existed in the Woman's Party at the time, because I think they expected me to dwell on the further injustices to women and the need to right those. I had no less wish than they that these should be righted, but I felt--perhaps from living in Oregon and knowing Mrs. Duniway very well (one of the old pioneers) and hearing from her the sufferings, really, and privations and mammoth courage that the pioneers of suffrage had gone through to obtain suffrage for women--that having done it the women had the power in their hands; the vote was power. I had proved that when I went to President Wilson and for the first time got a polite and something more than a casual answer from him, because I brought a petition and with it I practically said, "We do not come to beg, we come to demand." And I felt that this was true of women in every state; they could go to their state legislatures and say, "We do not come to beg, we come to demand," and where the laws were unequal it was possible for them to right those laws, which they never had been able to right before, and meanwhile World War I was on, the toll of life was terrible. We hadn't yet been drawn into the--yes, we had been drawn into the conflict. Here my dates are slightly mixed. I'm talking about the time of the presentation and the convention, which followed immediately.
- Fry: We had been drawn in already.
- Field: I knew we must have, because I remember writing a note to my son, who was living with me in San Francisco for the summer, one night when I had to go away overnight on a promise. I went reluctantly, because I hated a moment away from our happy times together. I wrote him that it was particularly hard for me to leave him then because I felt that this great Juggernaut of war was gradually drawing him in; he was only seventeen, not yet of age then. I remember there was a letter from him the next morning on the breakfast table, saying, "Do not worry, dear mother, I shall never as long as I live kill anyone, and if I can't get into the more humane services (as I think my chemistry will let me) of the military, I will then become a conscientious objector." I remember that so well.
- Well, when the armistice finally came, in November of 1918, so shortly following his death, I remember finding in his pocket the ticket to his graduating party at University

Field: High School, and there were two tickets, one for himself and one for the very beautiful girl he'd told me about that he was taking to the party. The strangeness was that she too died that dreadful year of the first flu epidemic, which occurred in 1918. So there they were, both taken away from life in their beautiful youth.

This is how, I suppose, it was personally (as it always had been impersonally) impressed on me how utterly immoral and wicked war was, and how absurd it seemed for man to be developing his higher powers and not be able to find a substitute in international negotiations for war. This I suppose came early in my life from my mother's Quaker ancestry and had grown during the years, and I have no doubt, knowing what the subjective influence on our external conflict is, that the death of my son with the death of this young girl, which was really caused by some of our young men being brought home who were too disabled to fight further with disease bugs that spread the flu—

Anyway, I went on to attend this convention, which was my first effort to go east again after the presentation of the bust. I went on with the firm determination that I would try to help turn our party machinery into effective work against war, and not only against but for those things that would make for peace.

Fry: What did you feel was the consensus of the party? What did they want to do with this machinery they had built up?

Field: Well, as I have said, Chita, I think that in those intervening months [while I was] doing nothing in connection, at least, with the Woman's Party, between August 26, 1920 and February 15, 1921, they'd had several months to consider what to do with their organization. It was too beautifully built--it was like a beautiful machine that you don't want to destroy--and I think they had resolved so firmly to go on with this fight for equalization of the laws that it was just cut and dried. I was too innocent to know this, and when the proposition was made from the platform and we were duly asked (which I suppose they felt was the proper thing to do) if people had any objections or other ideas, I arose and my speech was quite extemporaneous, but people said afterwards I spoke as one outside myself; I spoke with passion and power, and I don't often say that of anything I've done. I am only too aware of my inefficiencies. But that day I am sure some voice spoke through me, and was not of myself, indeed nothing I had come to know, but of some divine power that lives within us and directs us if we are not too full of ego to communicate and recognize it.

Field: However, while the audience was stilled by this, the stage was too well set, and it was my first bitter disappointment with women, that they were following in the tracks of men in which they weren't open to consideration of anything but the proposed program. It was too much like the days when both President Wilson and the president preceding him would receive delegations with due formality but with their minds all made up. My speech was applauded, which is of very little value, and there was a group that was swayed by it, but it was a minority group and the caucus went through.

The Woman's Party and the Cause of Peace

Fry: I wondered if anyone who did subscribe to your view were any of the past leaders of the campaign?

Field: I can't remember now. I was depleted utterly by this; I felt the Woman's Party had failed me as it failed the cause--I felt that it was taking on something which they'd given the power for women everywhere to do, while we worked on the problem which we have to admit is basic. As I said, "If we're destroyed, and there are predictions--" I remember saying that "--that worse and worse is to come until the planet itself may be reduced to ashes." I remember saying that just as if the nuclear bomb had been formed, because the bombs had been pretty bad even during World War I. As I say, I felt that the speech--it's not recorded; I almost wish that it were, not for myself but because I feel that it expresses still the deep wish of all these pacifists who are now assembling in different types of groups to protest against nuclear bombs. But it did move a certain number, just which ones I can't say. Alice Paul had a strange power over her membership, and I think the general feeling was that what Alice Paul thinks is right, is right; nobody should interfere with it. Well, nobody had told me (and I still would have taken the course I did) that Alice Paul had decreed that we should undertake this work for equalizing laws.

It was a stormy convention. There were others there who rose to support me. It all remains a sort of nightmare, because it burst upon me with the effect of a kind of mental bomb, that we weren't a free party as we had been, in which they [party members] really did listen to your opinions. I felt that those in power said, "Oh, let her speak, let her get it out of her system;" [that] was the idea, and that was all.

It might be interesting to say here, Chita dear, that two or three years ago I went East (in fall--whatever time it was).

Field: It might be interesting to record that the Woman's Party, feeling they couldn't utterly ignore me, because my trip across the country had been an essential part of the whole suffrage movement of the time, invited me to a tea at the Alva Belmont home. I was visiting my brother, who lived in Arlington, Virginia, and he drove me there. There I met the newer members of the party. I was struck with two things, that they were not young, as of old, in large numbers--indeed I only met one or two women who seemed even middle-aged; the others seemed quite along [in years]--and they were the stodgy, unenterprising, nonforward-looking type.

When they asked me to speak, I did so with reluctance, because I was too full of (I'm ashamed to say) a kind of bitterness, not to have to watch my words, but I did say that I had never deviated from the opinion I held at the time our Woman's Party convention was held after the successful passage of the amendment, that we should have undertaken war work, because we would have done it with a flair and a feeling and a quality of understanding that was rare, and we were well-organized to do it, and that I was sorry but that I had to say my heart was now with the movements that met for peace, and I spoke of the United World Federalists and of the SANE Nuclear Committee, of which I was a member, and I was met with a very cold response.

I said again, "This very house you met in here today, let alone the people in it, will go. What is more fundamental than this problem of solving war before it's too late?" But I met with that which President Kennedy has since spoken of, the lethargy of the people. He says he receives so many more letters for us getting the nuclear bomb testing (or did get letters, before we started it), and so many more letters even saying let's go ahead and start the war and get it over with, and be rid of all this uncertainty and unrest, than he gets from pacifists and from those opposed to it. There's something in this country that has been dulled by too much prosperity. They don't want to think about it. They want to think about going to the theater tonight and having a dinner party tomorrow night, and they don't want to give thought to this terrible and basic question that confronts us: what are we going to do if annihilation comes? Nothing. The answer is nothing. We can't do anything then. We have to do it now, or never.

Fry: So this really signed you off, then, in the Woman's Party?

Field: Yes. I got several letters from them afterwards, form letters asking me to give something toward this or that, but I either ignored them or wrote them back that I had stated my position

Field: and all I had to give is going into what I most deeply believe.

So that was finis as far as my relationship with the Woman's Party goes. (Not finis in the sense of looking back; they were rich memories. They were memories of people that had a cause as urgent as I now feel the peace movement is.) Because I felt women would contribute so largely to peace. They aren't women who seem to give their whole heart and soul to this; I thought it [the Woman's Party effort for peace] was perfunctory, whereas [I believed it would be] spontaneous, inevitable, as it were.

I knew one girl, her name is well known, she too has left the Woman's Party, not from the reasons I had but because she felt betrayed by other things. Doris Stevens was one of our most moving [women]; in fact, she's the one who came out here and conducted the booth during the time we got all those signatures and who lived with me for a while. I went to see her (she's married and lives in Croton), and her bitterness was very great but much more personal. I think it was more over her relations with Mrs. Belmont, whom she had served faithfully and done for her the work of what was really a private secretary, without pay because she believed in her as a great woman in the cause, and who had told her that she was going to remember her in her will, and then wrote her counsel erasing this. Doris felt it was largely under the influence of Alice Paul--who had got her to do it. (Perhaps this oughtn't to be recorded; this is personal and I'm not sure Doris would want it recorded.)

Efforts for Birth Control

Fry: Would you like to move on to San Francisco? I wish you could tell us about the birth control center which I understand you--

Field: I can't tell you much about that, except that as usual (it being a pioneer project that I believed in) I was with it, and I was threatened with arrest. We were all threatened with arrest. All those years were filled with what you might say was a very mixed lot of such activities as I could give [time to], because I was really beginning to take my poetry seriously and was doing my first book. [I] was getting ready to send the manuscript off, and to my surprise it was taken at once, almost, by a new firm. They weren't new in the printing world. I think before Grabhorn, [William Edwin] Rudge was considered the greatest printer; he had longed to go into the publishing business on a modest scale, and he particularly desired to print poetry. I have an idea that

Field: my Pale Woman was the first book he ever [published], but I can't be sure of that. But he took it. He first submitted it to several readers who liked it very much and approved of it. I was working on that [Pale Woman], and whatever I did in a public way was rather scattered.

The birth control movement was so short lived. I did consult with Mrs. Sanger, who came out to see that it got started, but just why it failed I am unable to say. The next thing I received was a notice that they'd had to close down their headquarters, and it was an exceedingly short time after they'd opened it, so you can see there wasn't much to say about that except that it was started in San Francisco.

Fry: Under what conditions were you threatened with arrest?

Field: That it was against the law to teach birth control.

Fry: San Francisco was under the control of some very strong church groups, I suppose?

Field: Very strong, especially Catholic. It was a strongly Catholic city. At that time they opposed it [birth control] tooth and nail. They're softening up on it now. There's a Dr. Brock, who's a good Catholic and a member of the Harvard medical staff, who came out fully for the use of the pills the other night on a panel. He said, "I can't see any difference between teaching the rhythm method," (which the church allows) "and giving the pills, which are sure." Everywhere I find Catholics now who say, "Oh yes, this has got to be done." I can see that the Catholic Church had to encourage [large families] in the earlier days when they were a great minority. When I was a little girl the Catholic Church was so much a minority that the Catholics on our street were looked upon as something queer. They had to encourage large families. And they now encourage what they didn't once do; they didn't encourage intermarriage with Protestants. But now they find out that [with] the Protestant father or mother (whichever it is) having to promise that the children will be brought up as Catholics, very often the father or mother becomes converted, and they will allow it. I have quite a number of young friends who have married Catholic husbands (in this case) and have gone and taken the proper courses that the Catholic Church demands and become Catholics, and somehow a converted Catholic is more ardent than those born into it.

[end of interview]

Personal Religion

Corinne L. Gilb taped the following material on Sara Bard Field's religious views in an interview in 1954 for the Bancroft Library's Regional Cultural History Project. Because this statement was important to the memoirist and is not available elsewhere, it is included here.*

Field:

I think in later years I was searching for what might be called a spiritual equation that would cover both spirit and matter as Einstein searched for the equation that would cover all manifestations of energy--the unified field. When I found the Vedanta philosophy, it seemed to meet my need. It teaches One Reality--God in everything from a grain of sand to the soul of man. The Ultimate Truth which is non-duality--the One without a second--manifests itself in infinite forms and names which, ever changing, ever-passing, can not be called Real. Only the changeless, the Absolute, possessed in varying degrees of consciousness or "soul" in every atom is Real, reaching its greatest, its highest degree in man. One might say, and the great young monk Vivikananda did, Man is my religion. He used to say sadly, "Infinite man dreaming his finite dreams."

I must have been searching for this unity years before I found a philosophy for in my first published book of poems called The Pale Woman are these lines:

In the many Light I sought;
A dim star caught.
Then I sought It in the few,
The moon came, new.
Last I sought Light in the One.
Oh stars, full moon and blinding sun!

Gilb:

How would you describe your ideas about God in these years?

Field:

How can the finite describe the Infinite? Vedanta philosophy calls it the Self, the very soul of souls to be realized by the individual in deep meditation, as a transcendental experience. It is the hidden, inscrutable divine Power at the very center of existence. It is like a sun of unimaginable light piercing with its rays every plane of existence. I think I have always felt disunity was a destructive force, that everything that made for unity was constructive-- I think my interest in the suffrage movement, in the labor movement, came from a feeling of drawing people together, breaking barriers. Gradually I came to the philosophy which beautifully expressed all this. Vedanta has no quarrel with any religion or sect on

*Now the Regional Oral History Office.

Field: the face of the earth, believing all love the same goal: namely to find God, each by its own path.

Gilb: When did you come to the Vedanta philosophy?

Field: I'd say about ten or twelve years ago. I began to read it before my husband's death. I would read portions aloud to him and he, who had never known a religious inclination other than his worship of nature, became interested in it also. It was not until after his death that I joined the society--the San Francisco Center. I had had no affiliations of any kind since I left the orthodox Baptist church, and yet always underneath my strong reaction to organized religion was this longing to find a philosophy which would embrace the many in the One, diversity in Unity--break down barriers between sect and sect, pagan, Jew, and Christian, embrace them all. That, and much more, I found in Vedanta.

Gilb: Did the Great Depression of the 1930s change your life very much?

Field: Well, it reduced our income. The Depression did not change the course of my religious thought. It was always a consistent growth away from narrow creed into ever-enlarging, ever-profounder aspects of thought. But love was always an urge--the love that at first was all personal and later impersonal. Oh, I do wish I could fully express my ideas of and feelings about unity. Trying to express them in a few words is impossible.

Vedanta philosophy and other Oriental philosophies such as Buddhism and Zen Buddhism, both of which have their roots in Hindu thought, are, I think taking so strong a hold upon this country because the general world movement is toward the unity of man these philosophies teach, as well as because America is learning that material well-being at the expense of the starving millions brings no enduring happiness, or to be practical, security. With all the evil in the world today, cruelty and war and the threat to civilization itself, I think we are moving steadily toward a sense of one world, and, given time, mankind will achieve it.

Gilb: This would include such things as world government?

Field: Yes. And forsaking our provincialism or isolation. All that our two ocean boundaries, which we thought gave safe protection, did was to keep us from knowing and understanding people who lived beyond us. Even war, wicked as it is, helped. You remember the words in the Bible: "God uses the devices of wicked men to praise Him." So, since World War I and II

Field: and the Korean War took our boys abroad, where they mingled, and often intermarried with people of other races, they learned that nations they had considered inferior had their own culture and that civilization was not the sole possession of the white race, especially of America.

The mechanical devices that have reduced time and space, producing a shrinking world, had caused men and women of all countries to intermingle to an immense degree, and we have also learned our need to help the needy everywhere if our nation and our concept of democracy are to survive.

[end of 1954 interview by Corinne L. Gilb]

Colonel Wood's Religious Ideas

Fry: Wasn't there some sort of disturbance when the Blanding Sloan Puppet Theater presented Erskine's Heavenly Discourse?

Field: There was a great disturbance and it was due to his really dishonest use of the material in the book. He took things out of their connotations and made offensive and rather obscene scenes, which angered my husband. The police raided it, it was so bad. For instance, he [Blanding Sloan] had Eve (whom if you remember in the [chapter] called "Censorship," was simply admired for her physical beauty as one of the great manifestations of God's love of beauty, or of the fact that one of his attributes was beauty), he had her come and sit on God's lap and be petted--I mean on the [lap of] the puppet that represented God--which raised a great storn in San Francisco and the police raided it and closed it down, and my husband forbade that he open it again. He wanted to reopen it, putting things in their right position and not using anything but what was strictly in the book, because there isn't a line of it that anything but the purists (those who are excessively religious without understanding what religion is) could object to.

As a matter of fact, Heavenly Discourse is one of the most religious books there is because it shows my husband's great respect for truth and beauty and above all, justice, all done with that touch of humor, because he said, "You can teach best by laughter." At the very end, when God says he's going to destroy that little piffling spitball of an earth--"they are all so ignorant"; the one thing He can't stand is ignorance--and Jesus says, "My father, give them a million years," is one of the most beautiful and touching illustrations of Christ's

Field: eternal patience with mankind's blunders.

Fry: As a Christian, did Erskine believe in the position of Christ to God as it's brought out in that, as the intermediary between man and God?

Field: I don't think he did. I think he felt that God was in the human soul and you needed no intermediary. He thought we needed great teachers on this earth, and he respected Christ with a deep and profound respect as one of the greatest teachers that had come to earth, but he also respected Buddha; he respected Krishna, from whom the great Bhagavad-Gita is supposed to have come; he respected Lao Tse, who left this doctrine of "the way," which is a beautiful-- (Remind me to lend you a little book I have found interpreting that book, which I'd like to read aloud. It's very short.)

No, I would say that if he had been a churchgoer, which he wasn't--he had achieved, I think, an abhorrence of churches from his strict Presbyterian mother. She was a sweet woman, and he loved her dearly, but he resented the silly restrictions she put on, for instance, whistling on Sunday. They weren't allowed to do anything that was normal on Sunday. And his father was, while a freethinker, a strict naval disciplinarian, and Erskine had been brought up under so much discipline that when he came into his adult life he wished to live a free life, free of all these "thou musts and thou must nots." I think he came nearer the Unitarian Church in ideas, and that's what made him so open to the Vedanta philosophy, which he felt had even a wider scope. But he hadn't gone very far in that when he died.

[end of interview]

XXX FRIENDSHIPS MADE IN RUSSIAN HILL

[July 26, 1962]

Beniamino Bufano

Fry: Sara, I understand from other sources that you had a great many friends among the artists and writers of the Bay Area, as well as New York, who would come and go at your house on Russian Hill.

Field: Yes, we did. Some we met for the first time, and some of them became lifelong friends; others were more or less casual, touch-and-go acquaintances. But even so things would happen with those that were mere acquaintances when they were at our house that gave clues to their characters and their individuality, some of which I would like to record because they are so indicative.

I think perhaps the most impressive, and later disturbing, person that entered weekly into our lives while we were living in the city was the now noted sculptor Beniamino Bufano. He had come almost mysteriously to see me just after the accident when my son was killed. I was in a condition to be very receptive to anyone who felt that he could take the photographs of my son and construct from them a head, because there were no other likenesses of him except photographs, and not many of those in his young boyhood. He was very sure he could do that and he had such an appealing look about him, with his great soft Italian eyes and gentle manner and quiet voice, both Erskine and I rather committed our hearts to him at once. When we went to live in the house on Broadway and Taylor, we found out that he was very poor, and (as we thought) had almost no place to work. He was extremely secretive about his life; we never did know just exactly where he went to sleep at night, but that he had no place to work was very certain, so we proposed that we fit him out with a place at our house where he could

Field: do his sculpturing, and we did do that.

He was a very small man in stature, and like so many small men he had an overdose of ambition, a desire, perhaps to extend his stature subjectively in what he did. He wanted always to work in the large, and that increased almost to a mania with him as he grew older. He also had a rather ruthless nature which we had to gradually discover, and didn't discover at once. For instance, it seemed that he was married and had hidden his wife away. He never once told us about her or suggested that she join us as he did on the holiday festivities. She was an utterly unknown factor to us. When we learned, later, that he was married and that we had been leaving her out of all our warm embracing of Bufano in our lives, we were shocked, and that was our first shock, but that was to come later. Meanwhile, seeing he undoubtedly had great gifts, my husband and I at some sacrifice to ourselves decided to help him fulfill a very deep wish of his, and that was to go to China to study glazes. So we put up funds for that and he did go to China, and as a result produced some very beautiful work. He only gradually revealed his inner life to us, and what we saw on the surface we took as the reality of him, and as I say we gave him our friendship and our help unstintedly. He never did make a good head of Albert. It was impossible to do it from two-dimensional photographs. We had to lay that aside and tell him, as best we could without hurting his feelings, that it wasn't like him and it was too unlike him to accept even as a work of art.

Meanwhile, he came and went, and when we moved to Los Gatos he did some very beautiful work which became a permanent part of the house and therefore couldn't be taken away when I left, because anything that's a fixture, as it were, built into the house, is not by law removable. He did a fountain, an exquisite fountain in our patio. It was of two children, and I say here by parenthesis, looking back I can see it was indicative of his immature nature that he could do children better than anything else. These two children, which he did in an exquisite dark blue glaze he'd learned in China, stood under the fountain when the water was put on, hugging each other with that air of both delight and fright, or at least retreat, that children have when some experience in their lives goes on that both delights them and gives them a little tremor. It is I think among the loveliest things he ever did, and I am very glad that the people who now live at The Cats appreciate that because it was heartbreaking to have to leave it. He also did a bronze insert into the wall, a bronze relief of both Erskine and me sitting under a tree of poetry, symbolically, in which are all kinds of little animals, rabbits and birds and other creatures that might go up into the tree.

Field: He did these things with, I think, as much affection as was in his nature, and of course with a great delight that his work could be in a place where it could be seen, because later on he never allowed anyone to buy privately anything he made. His mania for fame was so great that he felt everything he did should be in museums, or else out in public places such as he has had them since. I don't think he has any in Golden Gate Park; he did the great statue of Sun Yat-Sen which stood in the Robert Louis Stevenson [Portsmouth] Square down in the heart of Chinatown later. It was of huge dimensions, a dimension which kept increasing all the time as he continued in his work. He later did the immense St. Francis which has a very varied history, being shipped here and there. He always lived in poverty and what money he was ever paid for anything, I think, practically all, except bare living expenses, would go into his materials because he insisted on these colossal figures, either in bronze or stainless steel or some such stuff.

Fry: What about his Father Serra? Didn't he do that, too?

Field: I don't remember his Father Serra. I know he did this immense St. Francis, but I can't remember any other religious figure he did.

Later on we had a very sad experience with Bufano, but it is too long and too intricate in detail, and, I'm glad to say, probably pushed down too far into our subconscious for me to remember it. It necessitated a lawsuit in order to claim certain works of art which he had allowed us to have. He was going abroad and he had buried these things on our place, with the understanding that they were to remain there--everything from figures of Christ to an adorable group of puppies. He was so frightened that collectors would get them, because he was beginning to be famous, that he as I say wished these things buried while he was abroad on some matter of his own. When he came back he claimed them all, although some pieces had previously been bought by us, probably before his insistence that everything he did was to go into museums, and we had to go to law to repossess them. He claimed some that he had buried there that belonged to us and a few, I think that were not buried because they were marble and weren't subject to the benefits that the chemicals of the soil would do for them.

Fry: Do you know why he hid his wife away?

Field: When we found out about this little wife we were very angry about it, and we went to see her.

Fry: You were still living in San Francisco when you found out about the wife?

Field: Chita, I just can't remember whether we were in San Francisco or whether we had moved down to The Cats. The mergence of those two things in connection with the people we knew has now made it seem almost like an unbroken situation. I think we didn't know about her until after we left the city house, but I may be wrong about that. I think it was the first thing that opened our eyes to the duplicity and secretiveness of his nature, which was carried to this extreme. We hunted her up. She had a child also, and whether Beniamino was supporting her at all or she had had to go to work is another thing that's vague in my mind, but I know we helped her financially a great deal. We felt very sorry for her, and it wasn't until she herself became very peculiar and really most uncertain in her conduct that we let her drift out of our lives. But for a long time we didn't. We were very much concerned about her.

Fry: Did he resent your helping her?

Field: I think he did. He resented our knowing anything about it, and when we upbraided him for this and said, "How could you let us take you into our lives so deeply without your telling us about this wife, and later this child?" He said that that was no concern of ours whatsoever, and it was no concern of his to tell us about them. This naturally wasn't a very reassuring attitude on his part as to his character. We had already sent him to China, and what she did all through that time I can't imagine, because we knew nothing about her then. But he was the result, I'm sure, an extreme result of what I've noticed so often in little men--I mean little in stature--that they have an extra striving for greatness in some respect, or they attain to a rather marked pompousness.

Fry: The Napoleonic syndrome.

Field: Exactly. I think in his case it amounted to a mania. He wanted to be really a single great figure; he didn't want, really, to have a wife and child. It was only, I suppose, the urge of nature that made him marry her at all, and as I say she was certainly kept hidden and unknown for a long time.

Fry: He has been making a noise lately about the final depositing of some of his statues in San Francisco.

Field: He will make a noise about that to the end, because he is so obdurate about in no way allowing any museum to have them.

Fry: But he doesn't want private persons to have them, either.

Field: No. He wants them out in the public where everybody can see them

Field: and say, "That's a statue by the great Beniamino Bufano."

I must say in his favor that he was unalterably opposed to war; he cut off one of his fingers deliberately so that he wouldn't be subject to the draft.

Fry: Were you ever with him in any pacifist activities?

Field: No.

Fry: I wondered if his pacifism could have been the result of some of your influence?

Field: Oh, I don't think so. I think it was in his blood, I think as an artist and as an essentially gentle nature--in many respects ruthless when it came to his work and to his place as an artist, but otherwise there was a gentleness there too. He was one of the most complex characters I've ever met. I think too that he had been hardened, as one of his attitudes would have to be hardened, by the attitude of the world, which wasn't always receptive to the fact that he was this great artist whose work should be placed always on hills or in prominent places. He would run up bills for storage of these things when they weren't accepted which I don't know to this day what amounts they were nor how they were paid.

Fry: Did he remain with his wife as long as you knew him?

Field: No. They finally were divorced. You must understand that after the utter betrayal of us which he had made--(I have the papers for that if you want them for the record, but I don't understand very well legal language and I also was so disturbed to see how much of my husband's time and energy the case took, energy he should have been expending on his writing, and at his age particularly, that I kept pretty apart from it so that I could really keep my strength intact and not spend it in anger on Beniamino). But you understand that this naturally made a great break between us, and from the time of that suit, which happened while we were at Los Gatos, on we have never had anything more to do with him, at all. We felt he was a dangerous person to be in contact with. I think he wouldn't hesitate to betray his dearest friend--in fact, I think we were his dearest friends for so long. We cared for him and treasured him and appreciated him as an artist, but I think he wouldn't have hesitated to betray anybody else that also befriended him, and I have heard since that he did betray them.

Fry: Then you knew him, I guess, around 1919, when he was relatively unknown.

- Field: Oh yes. He was absolutely unknown when we first knew him. He had just come west. He'd lived in New York, where (he told us) he had to steal bananas off vegetable and fruit carts, which they had in those days, in order to get anything to eat. It was evidently a large Italian family, very poor, and he had managed to make his way west to pursue his art and was not known at all when he came out here.
- Fry: He came to see you in response to some inquiries which you had been making, to find someone to do the head of Albert?
- Field: No. As I say, he just appeared mysteriously one day when we were still living in that house in San Anselmo which we took temporarily. After I was taken from the hospital, my husband had rented this furnished house, because I couldn't be moved far from the hospital, so it was almost astonishing that while we were longing and wishing that something of permanent value could be done with Albert's [likeness], he just turned up. While we knew nothing of his ability, he was an extraordinarily appealing young boy--he was just a young boy, really, then. I imagine he wasn't more than twenty years old, perhaps a little older, but not much older. He was so sure he could do this and he seemed so utterly sympathetic and understanding that in our simple way we rather committed our hearts to him.

Ralph Stackpole, Albert Elkus, and Others

- Fry: Did you know Ralph Stackpole?
- Field: Oh, very well. There was a very different type of character indeed. He is still [a friend], though he lives in Paris now and I don't hear from him because he's a busy sculptor over there, and yet I have that sense of a friendship that goes on even though we can't keep in close correspondence.
- Fry: Would you like to go on to some of the other names on the list?
- Field: One of the dearest friendships that began while we were living in the Taylor Street house was with Albert Elkus, who was a bachelor at that time and was himself living in an apartment in San Francisco on Powell Street. I cannot remember how we met him. Certain friendships seem to spring up like flowers from the ground and you don't remember the spot or the circumstances in which you found that flower, but he became one of the most permanent figures as far as friendship goes in our life always, up to the time of his death many years later. He

Field: was living mostly I think by teaching, and whether or not it was then that he did so much in the organization of the music department of Dominican College in San Rafael I don't know, but I have an idea it was at that period that he was doing that. He later had a big hand in the Mills College music department, all this before he was called to be head of the music department in the University of California, which came many years later.

During this time, when he lived not too far away from us, we saw a good deal of him. He would come to our house for parties or the groups and gatherings that would meet there, and we would go to him. I remember particularly a lovely party at his apartment he gave for us when we returned from Europe. The invitations were printed by Grabhorn. I think there's one in the Bancroft Library, because they're trying to assemble all the printed matter which Grabhorn has ever done. It was beautifully printed, and it said, "Come to the Wood and Field." We met Mischa Elman there that night, among other celebrities. We used to see him from time to time after that whenever he came to give a concert in San Francisco. We found him amusing; his ego was so harmless and utterly naked, laid before you [laughs] with an almost childish lack of covering, that we found him delightful. There are certain types of people who can be awfully fond of themselves but openly and simply, and with no hidden byways such as Beniamino had.

This period of our lives, so far as living in San Francisco, was comparatively short. It took us very little time to see that we could not get our work done there. Someone was at the house, as it seems to me, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Later Llewellyn Powys was to say that the doorbell had been worn green from the thumbs that pushed it. I find that many of the friendships that began while we were there had their deepening when we moved to Los Gatos. I remember that down there Albert [Elkus] brought Harold Bauer down at one time; he was a very famous pianist. And of course he brought others, but my memory would have to work on that.

Fry: Did Albert Elkus ever talk to you much about music?

Field: Oh yes, indeed he did. Not at the period that we were living in that house. He often played for us. He used to do a good deal more personal playing than he did in later years. In those years when he was so busy helping the organization of various departments of music, he didn't get the time to practice and he was too good a musician to feel that he could do any performing without plenty of practice.

Fry: But he would play at your house?

Field: Yes, very often.

Fry: Did you feel that he wanted to spend his time organizing music departments, or did he covet more time for composing?

Field: I think Albert was always interested (as he later told me and of which I would rather speak when we get to Los Gatos because I can place these incidents more carefully)--but I think he was always, from the first, more interested in developing the young, bringing out their talents and their abilities, than he was in his own personal work, such as composition, which he had certainly showed his ability to do in several very beautiful compositions.

But as I say these were contacts which had their ripening and fruition more or less down at Los Gatos. It was only the occasional visitor that didn't come into our lives any more of whom I can speak at this time.

Edgar Lee Masters

George Sterling brought Edgar Lee Masters to the house.

Fry: He has a reputation for being a bitter man.

Field: Oh yes, extremely bitter. The experience we had the one night that he called on us emphasized that very quality in him.

I will say here by way of parenthesis that he became a very close friend of my sister and her husband, who was an excellent and well-known journalist in New York, and there they say a good deal of him. You'll find references on that in Mark Schorer's Life of Sinclair Lewis, in which he speaks of Lewis visiting them often and of Masters also.

This particular occasion that he came to see us was one of the most uncomfortable circumstances that happened while we were living in the Broadway and Taylor house. My gentle, lovely mother was staying with us at the time; she had come out to spend the winter with us, and it was natural that we wanted her visit to be one of unbroken happiness. She was in the room when Edgar Lee Masters came. We had explained to her, who didn't know his poetry very well, how famous he was and read her a little of what he had written and she was prepared to meet the kind of man she supposed every poet was, a gentle and amenable creature. Instead, she met this man who almost immediately seemed to sense, in a cruel way, how deeply she felt about her orthodox Christian views, and to attack them.

Field: Among other things, he said that Christ was the meanest man who ever lived on this earth, and he gave as an illustration the verse in the Bible, which is certainly, I think, and many scholars believe, one of the many interpolations that has crept into the gospels, written as they were so long after Christ's death (if he did exist and wasn't a mythological creature as some scholars believe). [He cited] the verse that says those who deny the Holy Ghost will be sent to the bottomless pit. I myself forget the exact verse. I should have looked it up for you. It is a verse that I don't feel could have been uttered by Christ, but Masters took it as part of His sayings, and said that it proved that he was really a vindictive and cruel man. My poor mother, who had listened a good part of the evening to denunciations of the hypocrisy of Christianity and Christians in general, got to the point of tears and she just got up quietly and left the room. I think it was really one of the bitterest experiences she ever had. She never dreamed that anyone could say such awful things about a man who to her was divine and whom she worshiped. So my memory of the one and only visit that we had from Masters was that.

I will say that he was very devoted to my husband's Poet in the Desert. He felt that some day that would be recognized as one of America's great poems; he felt it was greater than Whitman and he was exceedingly kind about that. I think he was a bitter man in general, but his experience as a poet had made him more so. He rose to fame on the Spoon River Anthology, but none of his collected poems later were ever very well received or had much of an audience, and it seemed to have turned him into a great bitterness.

He was a lawyer in Darrow's office, a partner of Clarence Darrow, for a while.

Fry: And at the time you knew him he was between his two wives, apparently.

Field: Yes. He had a pitiful life. I don't know what became of the second wife, whether they were happy together at all. I don't see how anyone could be, with a man that had developed so utterly acid a view of life as Masters had. But anyway, he died in a shabby hotel with only the contributions of those who appreciated him as a good poet to live on--in other words he was a charity case and a pitiful one at that.

Fry: Did you get any inkling of his ideas on politics and civil liberties or anything like that? Did he discuss these with you?

Field: Very likely he did, because they always more or less came up, but

- Field: I think mostly it was a discussion of poetry and a long and vituperative denunciation of Christianity, against which he had a [inaudible] that was as deep as any chasm could be.
- Fry: Did Masters look to the rise of regional poetry? He himself was a Midwestern poet and carved his place as a great Midwestern poet. I thought he might be looking to Erskine to represent the desert—
- Field: Well, I don't think he was. I think he simply felt that there were passages in it that were prophetic and poetic at the same time, of very great profundity and far vision.
- Fry: What did you think of his opinions on poetry in general?
- Field: Bitter. He couldn't say enough against Edna St. Vincent Millay, who had risen to her peak of fame about that time or was rising to it. I had ventured to say, I remember, that I felt she was what they might call a girlish poet; the poetry was full of a quality that belonged with extreme youth, and as such it was representative. He resented that greatly and said it was light and piffling and had no lasting value.
- Fry: Did he think poetry in general was going to the dogs? Or did he like the new experimental poetry?
- Field: I can't remember this, darling. The conversation was, for me, pretty well wiped out by this very cruel thing he said to my mother. You can't think how deeply that offended me and I didn't have much heart for anything else. I think I went upstairs to be with Mother and didn't hear all the conversation that went on. George Sterling tried to mollify him and to say things that would comfort my mother before he [Masters] had reached his peak of insult by saying that Christ was the meanest man that ever lived. That was final, my mother couldn't take that, but up till then he'd been trying to mollify Masters and soften what he said.

George Sterling

- Fry: George Sterling is almost a legendary figure now.
- Field: I'm not enough of a critic to understand why he is only a legendary figure now, for I think he wrote some really beautiful poetry and he certainly was San Francisco's boy. He loved "the cool gray city of love," as he called San Francisco, and I would have thought that, if only because of his tributes to California

- Field: and to San Francisco in particular, his poetry would have more life today than it has. But poetry is passing through so great a revolutionary change that the kind of verse that Sterling wrote is abhorrent to the modern young poet, and for some reason [the new poetry] is temporarily, I think, crowding out all the other poets of this region so that you hear very little about them in general.
- Fry: Sterling was accepted as a poet and also as a sort of high liver, wasn't he?
- Field: Yes. His life had a certain dashing romance about it, and his poetry was certainly commented on and published a great deal in magazines, not only here but elsewhere.
- Fry: Did he support himself on his writing?
- Field: Yes, I think he supported himself on his writing, or else perhaps his wife supported him. He had a perfectly lovely wife; everyone felt sorry for her, because he was pretty much of a bounder. He was always falling in love with some new beauty or attractive girl. He was particularly attracted to young poets. But he had a sweet and appealing nature. Everybody loved him and forgave him.
- Fry: He must have been a real charmer.
- Field: He was, and he was not only that but he was one of the most generous men to other poets. He was anxious to bring them out; he had much of Albert Elkus's desire to help those who showed any gifts at all. He was really the first one to recognize Robinson Jeffers. Oh yes, I remember his sending us Tamar, the first great poem of Jeffers, with a little note saying, "This is the greatest poet that California has produced." And this was long before people knew Jeffers' name. He had published two books before, which had gone practically unnoticed, so he always felt that Sterling had been, you might say, his John the Baptist, and had gone ahead to proclaim him. I think he never ceased to be grateful to Sterling and to value his friendship all his life.
- Fry: He called attention to Jeffers; he didn't actually help in publication or anything like that?
- Field: I don't think he did that, but he did call attention to him and Tamar was at once recognized by critics, once it had been made known to all. I think it was published by Jeffers privately, but Sterling was untiring in seeing that it got around to critics of magazines or newspapers. I remember Mark Van Doren writing a very enthusiastic essay about him [Jeffers] in the Nation, which

- Field: was a very popular paper in those days, and other critics followed suit. This really was the foundation of Jeffers' fame.
- Fry: Sterling at this time had contacts because he was pretty well established?
- Field: Oh, indeed he was, very well established. That's why it's so hard for me to understand why he [Sterling] seems to have sunk into oblivion so much now. Well, perhaps there wasn't the enduring quality to his poetry, maybe it was like his character, sweet and aesthetically appreciative of all that California had in those days when it was much more agrarian than it is now. California has changed greatly since the industrial wave overtook it.
- Fry: What collection or poem of his did you like best?
- Field: I think you'd have to take his collected poems and single out the ones that one likes best, but of all the books that he published separately, although it was a slender volume, I think I like To A Girl Dancing. I think that is a very beautiful poem.
- Fry: Do you think it's better than Testimony of the Sun?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: I was reading a critic yesterday who thought he almost had never surpassed that.
- Field: Well, it's possible that he never did and that I'm just partial to this particular little volume. It's a more perfect thing, it seems to me, as a poem.
- Fry: Do you like his type of imagery?
- Field: Not particularly. I don't think I was ever a very great--you might say worshiper of Sterling. I appreciated him and I was reverent to his place in the poetry of California, but I cannot say that his type of imagery was the sort that appeals to me too much.
- Fry: Did you like things a little less--bombastic?
- Field: Yes. A little less ornate.
- Fry: Someone has called him California's last classic bohemian. Would you agree with that?
- Field: I'd have to think about that a little. [Laughs]

- Fry: He really enjoyed eating and playing; did you have the idea that he knew how to enjoy the moment?
- Field: I think he did, without it fully satisfying him, because if he had enjoyed the moment fully so that it had been absorbed into a kind of rich tapestry of life, I don't believe he would have committed suicide, as he did. Underneath all his popularity and his bohemian living there was a sadness in him, a certain dissatisfaction, a certain sense that something was wanting. And I don't say that as an afterthought because he committed suicide. I think I have written about him in the Overland Monthly, in a number that was dedicated to him after his death, some impressions I had after one of his visits--particularly of this underlying sadness and sense of fatalism.
- Fry: Did he live recklessly at all?
- Field: What do you mean by recklessly?
- Fry: Did he not give much thought to consequences of what his behavior or his day-to-day decisions--?
- Field: Well, one never knows what in the inmost soul of a man is going on. He didn't appear to.
- Fry: To live recklessly?
- Field: No. He didn't appear to give much thought to it, I mean. He seemed, if not to live recklessly, to do more what you said before, to believe that the immediate thing was the thing to be done, and therefore I don't suppose he consciously was weighing the results of it. But subconsciously somehow something must have been going on, a dissatisfaction with life.
- Fry: Was he able to be productive in a way that meant that he had control of himself, to harness his talent?
- Field: Well, one would have to measure, you might say, the amount and the substance of his poetry and study it carefully to see that. I suppose that he, being fairly prolific, must have had more or less discipline to have taken the time to work.
- Fry: I was thinking about you and Erskine at The Cats, when you would go up into your study and you had a relatively regular schedule.
- Field: Yes. I remember George Sterling asking us about that, whether we were lonely down there, because he'd been to the house [San Francisco] and saw what kind of glittering array of people came there. It was easy for them to get to in the city, you see,

- Field: and we had made really great efforts when we went down to Los Gatos, even to having it put on our stationery that visitors were only by invitation. They were respectful of that.
- Fry: And he was a little concerned that you might be lonely?
- Field: Yes. We said we were never lonely because we had each other. It was sufficient. We loved our friends and we were glad to see them on occasion, but we had come there to work.
- Fry: Do you think he asked you in a way trying to understand this point of view?
- Field: I think so. He was very gregarious. I think he couldn't bear to be away from people. As you know, he lived his last years right down in the Bohemian Club, than which there is no more, you might say, lack of people than there would be on the city streets. He always seemed to need that. I think he needed inner reassurance all the time. You know, people who can't bear to be alone are suspect, in the sense that you realize they really haven't a deep inner life of their own, and I think perhaps only when George was writing was he content. I really think the other was an escape.
- Fry: I guess he never found what he wanted.
- Field: No, I don't think he ever found it.
- Fry: You visited a lot with George Sterling, I guess, when you were in San Francisco. Did you go to concerts or plays with him, take part in his bohemian life at all?
- Field: No. Hardly at all. Life was rather confused then, not only with people, but my husband had to go up to Portland several times on unfinished business and keep contact with his family, which he wanted to do and I wanted him to do, so that we didn't have a great deal of time to go about with people. Also, we had a deep interest as you know in the little theater, the school of the theater arts movement which he tried to build in San Francisco.

[end of interview]

XXXI THE WOODS' SOCIAL CIRCLE

[August 2, 1962]

An Unconventional Union

- Fry: Sara, when you and the colonel were in the process of readjustment so you could live together, how was it that he finally made this full break with his Portland family?
- Field: He had, of course, only lived with very formal relations with his first wife for years, but he had lived in the house which they both occupied and on his visits to me he had come as a visitor only. But this was simply because he and I had both agreed that it would be wrong for him to make any fuller break until he was able to leave his first wife in comfort and also to assure his children of future financial aid. This he could not do, as I think I have explained, until the commission [was paid] from the sale of a large land grant that James Hill, the railroad man, was engineering through Oregon. He had worked on this as an agent for this company, which called itself the Anglo American Paris Agency, for James G. Hill. Something of that sort. Anyway, I know it was the bank that engineered the loans for the work that was carried on for years to acquire the rights to the property that had to be bought up all along the line that the railway was to be built, and even when I first met my husband he had a separate office for this work and a separate secretary, and it occupied a great deal of his time and work.
- Fry: He got his payment in a lump sum, then, around 1919?
- Field: That is it. The payments were not to come in until the work was all done and the land secured, and this was between 1918 and 1920. Therefore, when we moved into the 1020 Broadway house in San Francisco we decided the time had come when we would live openly as husband and wife, making no excuses and no explanations. We realized that this would be looked upon askance by all Mrs. Wood's friends down in this region, and she had a great many, and also there would be others not close to her or to us who would be

Field: hostile.

Fry: All this period during your recuperation, were you accepted as husband and wife then?

Field: We were by our close friends, but I think no one suspected that it was anything of a serious nature if they were not close to us.

Fry: It was looked upon as a passing affair?

Field: Affair, or a deep friendship, but as long as we were quiet about it and did not live as we did when we moved into the Broadway house, there wasn't any open hostility to it. After that there certainly was, among the upper classes for the most part and among the most conventional minds. We were--at least I, being a woman, was--sometimes a little hurt by the snubs and shows of hostility, but on the whole those people who saw the reality of our relationship and felt that a marriage ceremony being impossible was not just reason for us not to live together began to fill our lives so richly that we weren't at all lonely or forsaken. Indeed, we were almost too much sought. My husband was a famous man already in the legal world and even in the literary world, because he'd been contributing essays down the years when he lived in Portland (some of the most famous of the essays that later appeared in Heavenly Discourse), and had become well known. And he was well known as a poet, although in a rather small circle, because he'd written for and was always willing to contribute to obscure papers, like Louis Post's Public. But he'd written some stirring verses there and he was by no means an obscure man.

I had become well known through my suffrage work, which had been heavily carried by the newspapers. I'm proud of the fact that the Woman's Party, which was aware of my relationship with Erskine, never let that make any difference in their use of me in after years when I could be of use to them, before the amendment was finally ratified by the states.

Fry: I believe you mentioned to me once that when you and Erskine began to live as husband and wife you found that this gave you the cream of your friends.

Field: Yes, indeed it did. The people of course with whom we really had a communication of a deep nature were creative people, or people with broad ideas, and of those there were a great plenty. And the house became noted for large and warm hospitality, [for] its often successful gatherings or parties of these people, and for our individual contacts with them. I must say that it is a tribute, really, to the insight of people into what is real and

Field: what is merely a frivolous relationship; it is a tribute to the large number of that kind of people, because very soon we felt no loss in our lives whatsoever, and we felt, you might say, relieved of any necessity to do any pretending or covering up. It was wonderful just to live in the open as we were.

I want to say right here that it wasn't any flouting of the conventional ideas of marriage, although we neither of us believed that those were necessary; it wasn't a flouting of them, it was simply that Mrs. Wood stood in the way of our getting the divorce. She was unalterable in her refusal. She had been brought up a Roman Catholic, and while it is significant that she left the church to marry my husband, who refused to sign the papers that the Church required as to the bringing up of any children of that marriage [as Catholics], nevertheless she remained at heart a Roman Catholic. And also she felt a great hurt to her pride to think that her grandchildren, or her children, would remember her as a divorced woman. That seemed to her a great indignity.

Fry: Did Erskine continue to press for a divorce?

Field: Yes, he did, from time to time. I'll speak of that when we come to our trip to Europe, because it was from there he wrote the long letters that he hoped would convince her that he would always hold her in deep affection but that my daughter was threatened with separation from my life by the status that she forced us to hold and that as a mother he appealed to her heart.

Fry: Would you say that this was one of the biggest tests of Erskine's professed anarchism?

Field: I would say it was too, and by this time of course I had evolved enough in my passionate socialism (which I had held always ever since I was in Cleveland)--I had advanced enough and been taught my own experience how wrong it was to the individuals who truly loved and were kept in bondage by the laws of the land in regard to their union, I had become a convinced anarchist in that respect. Indeed I had become convinced of anarchism as a future ideal because it meant self-government in every way, and if society couldn't evolve to the place where it didn't need so much official control then evolution wasn't working out to that kind of perfection of society that I hoped for. But I had no illusions (and I'm sure my husband didn't) that this would happen for many thousands of years. But that was no reason not to hold it as an ideal and to practice it where the reality came out too strongly against the present control of the individual as regards marriage relations not to brush it aside.

Anarchism as a Social Goal

Fry: He felt that laws were only needed then in a society where ordinary individual morals had to be controlled from the outside?

Field: Yes, indeed he did, and he believed that human nature couldn't reach its perfection until it was evolved enough not to need those supports and this great force of what he called too much government.

Fry: This was an interesting viewpoint from one who made his living as a lawyer.

Field: I know, but as he said, "I have to play the game the way I find it. Meanwhile I kick against the rules." All his life he lived that way. Emma Goldman accused him once of being an opportunist and he said, "Well, if opportunism means taking any wagon that goes your way, I am, because I believe that's the way we evolved."

I don't think we suddenly blossom into the perfected society but I can preach it just as the Church preaches the ideas of Jesus Christ, which is to love thy neighbor as thyself. It will be a long time before we'll love the man in Africa, who is now our neighbor under the growth of quick communication and all that science has done for us. But it's an ideal to hold up.

Fry: Some time I'd like to go into some of the changes in human nature that he felt had to be made before anarchism could work. Would this be along the lines of the Christian ethic?

Field: Not necessarily Christian ethic. They would help, because with all his unorthodoxy he held the character and teachings of Jesus in the greatest reverence and felt that he was one of the great teachers who had come to this earth, and that therefore there would have to be many of the ethics that are involved in Christianity. But he didn't think those would be the only ones. He thought that the passion for liberty in the human breast and the oppression that is felt from control (which we now have especially in the way of government being able to tax us for wars that we don't want) would play its part also. I think if you would read, or would incorporate perhaps, some of what I have said in my introduction to his collected poems in which I try to explain his philosophy--all too inadequately but to the best of my ability--you'll find out what his feelings were about preparations for so far-off an ideal as anarchism; especially he was sure we had to go through a socialist period in which we would learn the lessons of sharing. We would abolish privilege and we wouldn't have this vast division between the privileged

- Field: and the underprivileged class, the rich and the poor.
- Fry: We wouldn't have the need, then, for the status-seekers?
- Field: No.
- Fry: As I understand what you're saying about your life when you decided to live outside traditional social roles, you had a very full social life of almost your own making and your own world. Now, what happened outside that?
- Field: What other world would we want? We had the world we wanted even if we'd been married by three priests.
- Fry: It turned out to work out beautifully for you.
- Field: Yes, it did. There were some in the social world with whom we were simpatico that were just as brave as the more so-called bohemian crowd, and we were invited to their homes and they came to ours, but we didn't crave social prominence. We loved people as people, and if people were like this, these that I speak of who disdained the fact that there wasn't the conventional marriage tie and still loved us and wanted to see us and were really eager to meet some of these distinguished people that came to the house, we were very glad to receive them into our circle. But I can't emphasize enough how unimportant those people who are merely prominent because of a social position largely due to money were to us.
- Fry: How important do you think this really serious question was that you and Erskine put before society, to the other people--the upper class and the more conventional?
- Field: Oh, I think it was very important to most of them, and was a cause of their never taking us into their blue books, so to speak. I think that the more property people owned (I think many of our reactions to society are based on our fear of losing property), [the more their views] were based on the idea that the law must be obeyed because not only were morals threatened but, extended into a wider field, the right to vast property would be also threatened. One had that feeling about so many.
- Fry: Do you mean that this was part of a socialistic syndrome?
- Field: No, not necessarily. I think they felt that any breaking down of the laws might extend further and further, so that their very rights to property were threatened. Perhaps in a way they did connect it with socialism and philosophical anarchism, which they knew we both believed in.

Fry: About this time Freud was first being read, and also right after the war came the first of our repeated series of Bolshevik and Communist scares in the United States; I was wondering if this had any influence.

Eugene V. Debs

Field: Well, very likely it did. I have a book which was prepared at the time that Wilson put Debs into prison, Debs and the Poets, which was the idea of a not too well known poet named Ruth Le Prade. It came out first in a rather cheap little book because they had no money to do it otherwise, but the book attained such popularity that it later came out in a better edition with board covers and with an introduction by Upton Sinclair.

Probably the first speech I remember making after we moved into the 1020 Broadway house was a protest speech about Debs being put into prison, an old man, after his great services to his country and to the working class. I remembered how I had been moved by him years and years before in Cleveland, when I saw him speak before an enormous crowd of working people. It seemed to me he must be more like Lincoln than any man I had ever seen; he had the same long lank figure and the same sad tender and yet strong face. And his love of people was such that when he became fervid he would almost seem to reach down and put arms around them. Of course he was deeply loved by the working class, especially the railway men; he organized, you know, the railway union.

To my surprise, when we were moved into this new house, this second edition [of Debs and the Poets], in better shape, came out and this copy was sent to me right from [the] Atlanta, Georgia, prison where he was confined. I would like to read into the record what he wrote because I think it tells more of his nature, the beauty of his response to any tributes that were made to him, and also his tenderness. I had spoken of the fact that I had had my little boy with me at the time I heard him speak in Cleveland. The overflow of the crowd was such that some of us had to be put up on the platform and I sat on the platform with little Albert, who was something like four years old, on my knee. After Deb's speech was over he turned, and seeing this little child came over and patted him and said to me, "This is the future that we must look to to bring about the changes I've spoken of tonight." and he bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

Field: So I wrote all this into my poem, which I'm not too proud of; it's pretty prosaic and wordy but it was the only powerful memory I had of Debs personally and so I wrote about it. Then came this book with this inscription: "My beloved comrade, your high heart and poetic tribute in the precious volume of the poets touches me to tears and thrills me with rapture too deep for words. You have an inspired vision of the poet and prophet, the tender loving heart of a lover, and the flaming soul of a comrade and poet. Believe me, with all loving greetings and good wishes, yours faithfully, Eugene V. Debs, Christmas 1920, Atlanta, Georgia." Of course, the protests came so constantly and so heavily to Wilson, that although Debs was an old man and had to stand the rigors of prison for almost two years he was finally released by presidential verdict.

Fry: Just about that Christmas.

Field: Yes, or a little later, I think it was, in the spring of '21.

Well, that was only one of the many wondrous contacts; even this was a more remote one than most of the others that we had while we lived in the house. My husband, who had also written a powerful thing (much better than mine) to him, had a separate copy sent to him. I tried to find that, too, but whether he had given it to one of his children or not I don't know. I feel he deserved it far more than I did.

Albert Bender

I'd like to speak about some of the characters who came to the house and that made their mark on San Francisco. I wanted to talk about Albert Bender. It seems a great pity that so soon the new generation covers up, as it were, the regard in which a man like Albert Bender, who really gave practically his all to the cultural projects of the city, was [held]. He was a man small in stature and with a slight speech difficulty, possible from a cleft palate. Whether it was, as Freud would say I'm sure, that [this was] part of his drive toward [giving] so much help, which some people thought was ostentatious--I always thought it came out of many other reasons and qualities in him--or not, I can't say. I'm not Freudianly minded and oriented to know, but I do know that nobody contributed more to the cultural efforts of the city than he did.

He was very much under the influence of a remarkable cousin [Anne Bremer], who rented an apartment in close relationship to him--it was a dual apartment in which there was a common dining

Field: room, but she lived her own private life and he lived his. She was a painter of distinction, her name was Anne Bremer. If I am not mistaken (and they haven't been replaced by a newer generation), some of her paintings still hang in the Women's Faculty Club on the Berkeley campus. They did for a long time and they were very distinguished paintings. She loved to paint the Monterey pines, with all their wind-tortured, strange shapes. She got them as nobody else did, and she loved to paint the sea views around Carmel. She left really a heritage of paintings dealing with part of California. She was simply adored by her cousin, and undoubtedly she guided some of his gifts, though I wish she had lived to guide them all because he made some bad mistakes.

He was always giving large contributions to Mills College, buying up very expensive and valuable books for them, so there's an Albert Bender collection of books at Mills College. Then he bought a large collection of Oriental art for the University of California. But unfortunately he was not a connoisseur and he got into the hands of unscrupulous dealers who convinced him that the things they sold to him at an enormous price were antique and of priceless value. When a man named [Alfred] Salmony, who was an expert especially on jade, antique jade particularly, came out he was disgusted with this collection, and much to Dr. Aurelia [Henry] Rinehart's dismay (she was president of Mills at the time I speak of) he told Dr. Rinehart that everything Mr. Bender had bought was worthless, both for Mills and for the University of California, and I think gradually almost everything had to be put in the basement or sold for whatever they could get. I don't know; I can't speak with authority on what's been done with them other than they've been removed from the showcases because they were not authentic as represented.

I speak of this because it has influenced since the direction of this very influential society for Asian art which has been formed in this generation. They have excluded dealers from any relationship with them whatever. They have nothing but scholars speak to them and lecture before them and guide them in all that they do, and of course it's through this Asian art committee that we have secured the great Brundage collection, for which a special wing of the De Young Museum is about to be built.

Fry: Kay [Caldwell] has something to do with that, doesn't she?

Field: Oh my, a great deal. She's one of the people to whom they appeal as an authority on Oriental art because she teaches it at Mills and knows it well, and she is an officer in the Asian art group.

Field: I speak of this very sorrowful thing that happened to Albert Bender because of all people that it could have happened to, it was tragic for it to happen to him. He was not a rich man, in the sense of owning vast properties or having anything but a very large income from an insurance business in which he worked hard. He had won the friendship of all Chinatown, which was flourishing in that day, and I think there was hardly a Chinese businessman who didn't put his insurance business into Albert Bender's hands.

Fry: How did he happen to win their [business]?

Field: Because he bought so much from them. One of his greatest enterprises was to constantly go up and down Chinatown, into which was pouring at that time, before the revolution, the most wonderful and beautiful things. They may not all have been authentic, but they were lovely. It must be understood that everything that isn't authentically old can be beautiful, and my husband himself bought much of it, never under any illusion that he was choosing as a scholar or that it was necessarily worthy of a place in an institution. Some things have gone into the De Young Museum that my husband bought, but not very many.

I think it was particularly tragic that this, as I say, should happen to a man part of whose impulse came out of fiscal misfortune, a desire to overcome, you might say, any weaknesses that these caused, because he had lived so frugally--very like the de Medici brothers. Well, [laughs] not very like them, because while they did live on a much smaller percentage of their income than what they gave to art and did for art, still it was comparable in a more touching sense, because I would say that Albert Bender had no luxuries of his own except a nice apartment, which was the poorer of the two apartments. He I think was a vegetarian; he lived almost on an egg a day or something like that; he had no car. He never owned a car as long as I knew him. And he went without everything that he could possibly live decently without in order that he might make these gifts.

I wouldn't like you to think that everything he gave was spurious, either; the beautiful books he bought for Mills College form a marvelous part of their library for those who are studying especially beautiful printing. He gave all the Grabhorn books. And then he did so much for individual poets. He even did so much for me. He just backed Rudge in publishing my first book, Pale Woman; he bought I think a hundred copies. And then on his own he published a little book of Erskine's and my poems combined because he felt that our lives ought to be bound together in those terms. It has a very understanding introduction by my son-in-law James Caldwell. It's a very small book, but

Field: beautifully done by Ed Grabhorn. It was of course more or less privately circulated, not because there was anything especially private in it but because Albert Bender didn't have the means to advertise or make it a public book.

I want to sum up what Albert Bender's life was by saying that it was one of immense service, not always informed service or service that could be cherished in its result, but the service could be cherished because his intention was to do things for San Franciscan culture in all directions. He would buy dozens of tickets for a beautiful concert and give them to people he knew couldn't afford to go. His whole life was one of the open-handed outgiving.

Fry: Do you know how he got interested in culture?

Field: I think through the influence of his cousin, Anne Bremer. She had exquisite taste. She wasn't a scholar and she didn't know either that these things he was buying in Oriental art were not all they were claimed to be. They were often beautiful but they weren't what they were claimed to be. Albert went through a very humiliating experience when Salmony came out. He was extremely rough and rude and he made all manner of fun of Albert's collection and humiliated him to a degree which was deeply painful not only to Albert but to all his friends who loved him and knew how generous and selfless his efforts were.

Fry: He also bought paintings from Carmel painters and others?

Field: Indeed he did, and also he was one of the first to recognize the great Mexican painter, [Diego Rivera]. He bought several of his paintings and they are now in the Museum of Modern Art* and highly praised. He also bought some of Stackpole's things and appreciated his sculpture very much indeed, as did Erskine and I. So you see how far-reaching his interests were and how amazing, for a man who wasn't a wealthy man but had a very good income, all of which he used, except about two percent, for these projects.

Fry: Did he agree with you about Bufano?

Field: I think he did at first, but Bufano's character was so unlovely and he so refused to sell anything to private individuals that he [Albert Bender] had not much dealings with him.

Fry: I think it should be said that one of the artists was a little bitter about Albert Bender because he felt that in some cases when he presented something to a museum, although the artist had given it to Bender in order to give it to a museum, Bender gave

*San Francisco Museum of Art, now called the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. (K.C.)

- Fry: this as his own and not the artist's gift.
- Field: It doesn't sound like him.
- Fry: Did he do any painting? Or writing or anything?
- Field: He wasn't creative. He was only creative in giving, and a great appreciator.
- Fry: Was he able to help you and Erskine in your school for the arts of the theater?
- Field: Knowing that he wasn't a wealthy man, we didn't go to ask him for the rather large sums that such a big undertaking needed. I haven't a doubt that he contributed small sums, but his real deep interest lay in painting and sculpture, and to a degree in music.

Jewish Contributions to San Francisco

- Fry: You said that Jewish families contributed to the culture of San Francisco more and were more of a society in San Francisco than almost any other city.
- Field: Well, I wouldn't say more in society; I would just say that there were certain society people that did beautiful things for us, such as sharing their opera box during a season from time to time and inviting us to their houses to meet others. They had a kind of sense that we were people who were doing things that some of the others thought were important and they were proud to ask us to meet some of their guests. But we never wanted to be in society, nor did we have the time. One of the reasons we had to move away from San Francisco was that we were just besieged by people. Somebody was there morning, noon, and night.
- Fry: I have the names here of Sigmund and Rosalie Stern.
- Field: She gave the Sigmund Stern Grove at the time of his death, where they have these free Sunday concerts.
- Fry: Can you make any generalizations about the contributions of the Jews as a special entity?
- Field: I certainly can. I can say flat footedly that culture as it is today in San Francisco would not have been what it is, or could not continue to exist as it does, in having a symphony orchestra

Field: and a conservatory of music that's now attracting students from wide distances, in having a civic opera--in all these enterprises the Jews have been most prominent and most generous and most necessary.

Fry: Can you give us some names?*

Field: No, not offhand. They entered so little into our life, other than our knowing that the Jewish contributors were those who continued to make these things possible.

John and Llewelyn Powys

Fry: I wanted to ask you about Llewelyn Powys.

Field: Well, we shouldn't begin with Llewelyn. It was John whom we first met. I think he was a far greater writer than his brother Llewelyn. He's still writing; there's a new novel out now by him. It's simply wonderful to think that that man is still going on writing; he's in his nineties now.

The way we met John, while we were living in the Broadway house, was by means of a letter which was sent to us I think by Harriet Monroe, who was the editor of Poetry magazine to which I had been contributing some poems and some reviews of other poets' books as they came out. She wrote us and said that "the most extraordinary lecturer I've ever listened to is coming to San Francisco. He's an Englishman named John Cooper Powys, and I do hope that you will hear him and do what you can for so shy and retiring a man as he is."

The first lecture we attended was at the St. Francis Hotel, in the Gold Ballroom I remember. This extraordinary figure came onto the platform, dressed in a Cambridge gown (from which university he'd graduated), stooped, and with an unforgettable face, hawklike, with a searching gaze. When he began to speak it was probably as near as I will ever get to hearing an Old Testament prophet. He simply lost himself in the character, he became the character, almost, of which he was talking, and he brought out the nature of the person as well as the worth of their work and a criticism of the work in general. His audiences were nothing short of spellbound.

Fry: And he never planned a lecture beforehand?

Field: He never planned a lecture. He was of course highly educated and deeply versed in English literature, so it wasn't the

*The names of some of these families were Haas, Stern, Koshland, Fleishhacker. (K.C.)

Field: careless talking of a man who's just had a little taste of things. But he never had any notes and as far as I could see (for you will see that finally he halfway lived with us and I would watch him before a lecture), he never made any preparations. He sometimes sat in deep thought before he would go to lecture, but other than that (and that was probably a rich and deep preparation), just that, there was no outward sign of preparation.

The first lecture I heard him give was on Shelley. I was at a period when my worship of Shelley was deep, and I was moved to an emotional state that I'm a little ashamed remembering, because he seemed to bring Shelley right into the room. If ever a man had--a word science despises and I rather feel is suspect too--but if ever a man had magic, to do this very thing.

I remember his telling how plebian, commonplace, the parents of Shelley were, and then to this kid-gloved audience--because of course it was an afternoon audience and mostly women, but a very large audience--he suddenly broke forth, "But I don't believe he was their son. I don't believe he was [the] Shelleys' son. I think he was a changeling, brought there by the fairies and just put into that crib."

Well, it sounds very soft when I tell it, but if you could know what a bombshell it caused suddenly right in the middle of factual things you would have realized what an effect it had. And of course it was exactly my own feeling, that Shelley must have come from some heavenly source because he was so early deeply and passionately concerned with human affairs.

After the lecture we took the letters of introduction we had and went to speak to him and he invited us to come up to his room. There, in trying to tell him how much the lecture had meant to me, in my shame, in the presence of an Englishman of all people, who are so reserved, I broke down and began to weep. I said, "I'm thoroughly ashamed of this."

And he said, "Don't be ashamed," and he ran and got a volume out of his bag, a volume of French poems, and he read me a poem in which it said that only the Anglo-Saxons are ashamed of their emotions. He said, "Undoubtedly you have Latin blood somewhere in you," and he made me feel at ease, which I felt was gallant of him because of course it was a shameful performance on first meeting a man to cry over his lecture. But he had just worked me up into such a state of emotional excitement about Shelley that this is what happened.

Well, from that time on he became a very close friend. He was, as Harriet Monroe wrote us, a very shy man. He endured the

Field: public but had no wish to have them tracking him down, and so (while he never actually slept in the house), he was at our house a great deal, almost, I think looking back, as if hiding away behind Erskine's broad shoulders. He had a very kind and at the same time sharply critical judgment of our poetry, especially of mine, but he was one of the helpers on my way I think to whatever growth I may have made as a poet. He had extremely funny mannerisms and temperamental ideas. He couldn't bear to touch linen; we had to supply him with a silk handkerchief or napkin at the table. And he claimed to be a vegetarian and whenever there was meat on the table he didn't touch it, but one night our Chinese cook brought in some simply delicious-looking fried chicken, fried in the Chinese manner in peanut oil, and Erskine just ignored serving any to John, respecting his vegetarian principle, and began helping him to the vegetable salad, which we always provided in abundance for him, and he looked at Erskine and said, "I'd like some of that."

And Erskine looked at him and said, "But John, I thought you were a vegetarian."

He said, "I am, except when it comes to chickens. They're so stupid."

Fry: He once wrote in his autobiography that the one cause that he really could give himself to was antivivisection. Was this why he was a vegetarian?

Field: Oh, that and the cruelty to animals that meat-eating involves. He'd seen cattle trains. He had a habit of putting up his two hands in front of his face when some memory that was an emotional shock to him came back, and he did that in speaking of a cattle train in which the cattle could hardly breathe, they were crammed in so together, and they looked thirsty. I think any outrages to animals would have made him a vegetarian. But the funny thing was that he said he would eat chicken because they were so stupid, they were a stupid animal. So you can see his eccentricities were around.

Fry: What did he mean when he wrote in his autobiography, "Everybody I meet seems to want to assert their ego. 'I, I, I!' They all cry this. No one seems to get the depraved pleasure I get from my turning my 'I' into thin air and helping my friends' 'I' to swell and swell till it's a regular balloon." Did you get this feeling he was helping your 'I' to swell and swell?

Field: No, quite the contrary. He was as I say sharply critical of my writing. He couldn't bear the poem I wrote in Debs and the Poets; he put up his hands again and said, "Oh, how could you be so

Field: sentimental!" I wouldn't say that he ever increased my ego the least bit. In fact quite the opposite. If I had too much-- I don't believe I ever had too much but I may have had a little more self-confidence than my work warranted, but I don't think there was any great sense of achievement for me to crow over.

But I can see he could do that. He had a certain malicious streak in him in which he would, if he felt a person was highly egoistic, he would love to do just what he said, turn his eye on them until they burst "like a balloon." I can see that he would do that and get lots of fun out of it inside of himself, but I think he also recognized--He says there that everyone he met was that way, but he had a great capacity for exaggeration.

Fry: He also seemed to feel that he could never face himself. He insists that he never read his own writing, once it was down on paper.

Field: No, he didn't. He was a man of strange dark and inner secrets, probably again exaggerated. He liked to think of himself as a kind of devil, and I am afraid that in many ways he had characteristics that could, if carried to the extreme, have been very dangerous to people. I think he had a sadistic quality in him, because in later years he confessed to this and said how he struggled to overcome it, in his autobiography. Of course it was this that made him very cruel to people at times.

When he went to Madison, Wisconsin, to lecture of course he knew Kay and she had become engaged to Jim [Caldwell] there, and he seemed to delight in baiting Jim. Jim remembers him with a great deal of, well, antagonism. And William Ellery Leonard, a famous professor there and a poet, got on his nerves some way too. Kay in her enthusiasm had given a dinner to which she'd invited Leonard and his wife, and of course Jimmy was there; I don't know who else. She said that all through the dinner John made a point of baiting William Ellery Leonard and of belittling him greatly, although he was a very famous man both in the department in which he taught and as to his poems, which I think are distinguished though few.

Fry: Did you notice a difference between John Cowper Powys and Llewelyn? Llewelyn was a nature worshipper, almost, and as I understand it John was almost oblivious to nature.

Field: He wasn't oblivious; I used to go on walks with him sometimes, and once we went over to Belvedere together and he saw some flowers, a little wilted, lying on the sidewalk, and he tenderly picked them up and carried them over to a place on the grass, which he said was the only proper place for flowers to die. If they were dying he wasn't going to have them dying

Field: on the sidewalk. So he wasn't oblivious to it, and once in a while he could write some very exquisite lines.

Let me see, I think I can quote a few from one of his poems in which he tells how the whips and scourges of life have wounded him, and I have no doubt they did. He must have been a queer character at Cambridge and was probably from the very first made fun of a great deal. He was telling this in a poem of his and then he breaks out, "But still in the garden I know the purple hyacinth blow, and their scent is as it was, and still where the long waves run, the wet sand gleams in the sun, and its touch is as it was." I think those are beautiful lines, both as to music and as to poignancy. So you cannot say he was entirely oblivious.

Fry: This was in the early twenties; was he aware of Robinson Jeffers?

Field: No. Robinson Jeffers had just come on the scene. What he thought of him later I never got to know because he finally, when his son grew old enough (the one and only son he had) to support his mother, whom he'd left but to whom he sent practically every cent he earned outside of the barest expenses--when his son, who took orders in the Church, could take care of his mother he retired to Wales with his young mistress and has become the poet laureate of Wales. I have many many wonderful letters from him, but there came a time when he was getting old and he evidently has had to concentrate all his energies on whatever creative writing he does, and I don't hear from him any more. Huntington [Library] has them all. They were like no letters in the world. They had all the strange uniqueness, both the dark and the light of his nature.

In the course of time Llewelyn came over. He was tubercular and had almost all his life fought tuberculosis, although strangely at the end he did not die of it, although he was in Switzerland for it at the very sanitarium about which Thomas Mann later wrote in The Magic Mountain. He came to our house through the fact that he'd come out to California to be with John, who was then living in Sausalito, which was not the best place for a person with tuberculosis. They used to come over together then a great deal, and I grew to love Llewelyn in many ways. His was, as you say, a nature sunnier; he was a hedonist by actual profession, you might say. He never hesitated to say that, and he was extremely critical, like his brother, in many ways. If people said something--spoke of a person who had died as "passing away," he'd have a fit. "Why don't you use the good straight English word 'died'?" he'd say.

Like John he had no use for anything sentimental, but unlike John, who is very prolific--his novels are long and diffuse and

Field: historical. Llewelyn, who didn't write novels but wrote essays, was chary of words and I think wrote a far more beautiful English, though John's works are, taken by and large, probably more lasting. Although perhaps that's wrong. Perhaps it's only to say they are in two different categories, and each is equally destined to live as much as the other. But Llewelyn's essays are really works of art and excellent in every way, and very full of humor. There was a man that took utter and complete satisfaction in nature. He didn't need any assurances of life after death or anything else as long as he could live the good life here and be in touch with nature completely.

Fry: He was an epicurean, as I understand it.

Field: He was an epicurean. He just delighted in--that's why I say he lived a good life--he delighted in all the good things that life could provide.

He had a sensitivity to atmospheres that was so keen I don't think I have ever known anyone quite like him. I remember one party that he attended at our house at which there was a certain person I don't wish to name, who hated me. She was jealous of me and hated me and would come to a party and just make all kinds of sly remarks. I didn't realize that anyone knew this but myself, but after all the guests were gone and John and Llewelyn were remaining for a little while before they went to their quarters. He suddenly made the same gesture that John did, with his hands over his face, and he said, "Oh my God, there was hate in this house tonight. You could have cut it with a knife." I thought that was extraordinary; not a word had been openly said, but he just felt this hostility and reacted to it very hard.

Fry: He thought that love and the capacity to love were the biggest thing in nature, the most important thing.

Field: Yes, he did. But it wasn't so much love in the way that I interpret it; it didn't seem to reach out into the interest of the world in general. It was circumscribed. He loved his friends, and he always made friends because of his warm, sweet nature. When it came to women I think he interpreted love wholly on the physical side. I don't think he ever, until toward the very end of his life when he married [a woman] who was the editor of that extraordinary new paper in the East--it was supported by one rich man largely, a magazine of experiment; it brought out Marianne Moore and other poets who now are numbered among the most important of the new school-- It was a person-to-person love. He could dislike as much as he loved. It wasn't by any means a promiscuous love, promiscuous in the

- Field: sense of just loving everybody he met. He took great dislikes to some people.
- Fry: He also had a more realistic contact with the world, didn't he, than others, to the point of being highly disturbed at the encroachment of fascism in Europe?
- Field: Oh yes, yes he did.
- Fry: More than, for instance, John Cowper Powys, who never was connected enough with the world for this, was he?
- Field: In the period in which I knew them best and had most contact with them the rise of fascism to the extreme point of Nazism wasn't yet prevalent, and I don't remember any discussions with them on this subject. This may be sheer forgetfulness because they were there a great deal, and most of our discussions were about literature and sometimes about people. They were both of them extremely fond of Theodore Dreiser, especially John. He believed in his work very much, which I think is an indication that he felt in touch with social justice because of course Dreiser deals with that, in Sister Carrie and other novels.
- Fry: He was a great fan of Dickens, too.
- Field: John Cowper Powys always held that Dickens was not a representative Englishman in his characters; his characters were not authentically English, they were just odd characters of Dickens' imagination, an assortment, and that Hardy's--he used as a contrast, Hardy's--characters were right up from the soil of England. He spoke about having tea with Hardy one day in a little village tearoom in one of the more remote counties, and a girl came in and Hardy said, "Look, John, there's Tess." He saw one of those types--
- Fry: I read Louis Wilkinson on John Cowper Powys, and he felt that he belonged to the school of Jacobean dramatists, and De Quincey, Emily Brontë, and that ilk. He feels he was not an artist, because he wrote without regard to form or style.
- Field: That's what I say, it was very diffuse.
- Fry: He felt that Powys might be improved if a skillful person could cut out a number of passages in his novels and make them a little more succinct.
- Field: I don't think that there's any doubt about it. Although Llewelyn worshipped his brother John I think he had the same feeling about John's work. Llewelyn was an exquisite craftsman; as I say, his

- Field: wise paucity of words was something very different from John's flow, which is very like in his lectures.
- Fry: Did either comment on the other to you?
- Field: I think they did, especially Llewelyn on John. Of course there was a strong family bond in the Powys family, which was an enormous family. There was [another] brother [Theodore Francis Powys] who wrote and was considered the real genius of the whole family. He wrote very few things, but his Mr Weston's Good Wine was one, about a man who cared more for his pigs than anything else. He lived the life of a hermit; he wouldn't even see--if something was delivered to him, it had to be just put down at the door and he wouldn't even go to the door.
- Fry: He was rather a God-fearing man, wasn't he? Highly religious.
- Field: Well, but [religion was] not as great as bitterness in him. I'd forgotten that that quality was there but I just know there was a great bitterness in his writing, and a great power to look into the heart of a person and see what their true drive was.
- Fry: What did Llewelyn think of him?
- Field: As I say they were a very loyal family. They thought he was wonderful. And there were other brothers; one was an architect, of whom I know very little, and a sister named Marian who had a lace shop for years and years in New York and mended beautiful handmade lace. She was an expert at it.
- Fry: Was she the poet? Or artist?
- Field: No. I think one of the older sisters was something of an artist. I didn't know much about her.
- Fry: Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Field: Nothing I can think of now.
- [end of interview]

XXXII GENEVIEVE TAGGARD

[August 16, 1962]

Neighbor and Friend

Fry: Sara, are there any other friends you'd like to comment on whom you met while you were living in San Francisco?

Field: Oh, there are so many I'd like to speak of, but many came into my life casually, others far more intimately. Indeed, as I think of the shortness of our time that we lived in San Francisco and the richness of our life there I wonder how it was that we had time to strength to absorb as many friends as we did.

One of them who was particularly precious to us was the poet Genevieve Taggard. She lived just across the street from us in a small apartment. She was married to Robert Wolfe at that time, who wrote poetry himself but who unfortunately later was confined to a mental hospital, a very sick man. She was a great comfort to my husband during the weeks in which I had an aftermath of my son's death, a nervous breakdown in which I had to go for a while to a sanitarium, and he was very lonely. She would come over and read poetry with him and it was she who very much encouraged some of his poems that he hadn't any particular interest in, such as "Cradling Wheat." "Cradling Wheat" is a record of the way he saw wheat garnered in the days of his youth, by Negroes with sickles; it is very rhythmic and I think one of the best poems Erskine wrote. She later published this in a little paper that she was editor of after she moved east, called The Little Magazine. During those months and perhaps two years that she lived opposite us we saw a great deal of her, first Erskine and then when I recovered, which I did pretty rapidly, I saw a great deal of her too.

We had the pleasure of being able to help her in many ways. For instance, we had already purchased the Los Gatos property, but not yet had built a house on it. However, we

Field:

would go down to spend weekends at the little shack that was already on the place, which was not much more than a possibility of living in. At those times we would let her use our house and it was a rather nice change from her small apartment because she had a little girl, who was at that time named Marcia Sara after me, but I think she changed her name, for some reason--possibly because I didn't become a Communist as she (the child) did when she grew up, walking in her mother's footsteps.

In those days Genevieve was all the poet. She was devoted to lyric poetry and her first book, Hawaiian Hilltop, had some very exquisite poems of a perhaps minor but still important lyric value. She and Erskine and I would have long talks on the subject of poetry in which we began to discuss the possibility that poetry ought to be able to serve the human needs in other ways than merely aesthetic ones. I mean by that that we began to discuss how much poetry and so-called propaganda could be united without blemish to poetic values. We both felt that Shelley had given us a great example of what could be done in that respect; his hatred of tyranny, his constant invective against it, perhaps do not embody his greatest poems, unless it is the one beginning, "the world's great age begins anew." But certainly with the supreme lyrical value that he has left behind the other poems demand study and attention, and one is glad that a heart so sensitive and so able cared enough about human welfare to sacrifice what Keats later scolded him for. Keats once wrote him and said, "Fill every rift with gold," as much to say he was doing it with something, a metal less valuable than poetry.

But we had these marvelous discussions and I feel that Genevieve enriched my life and I know she was a great comfort to my husband during the anxious weeks in which I was absent from him. She had a very serious emotional problem, because her husband, who was evidently showing great signs of instability even at that time, insisted on living away from her down in the country somewhere where he could do his important work. He had an extremely high idea of his own value as a poet. He never published but one small, slender volume of fairly good poetry before his breakdown, but her life was lonely too, and this brought her very close to us.

Genevieve was one of the most generous characters toward other young poets. She was beginning to be known herself but she always had time to help a young struggling poet. She was a great friend of George Sterling. I think he was in love with her at one time but I don't think she was ever in love with George. I think she looked upon him as a very good friend and that was all. Her life in the Hawaiian Islands had slanted her feeling toward

Field: social justice in a very definite way, and it's not surprising to me that in later days, after she had moved away to New York and had written many other books, she became an open Communist. She wasn't a Communist at all when we knew her; she had socialistic ideas just as we did, but she gave no sign of wanting any socialistic ideas to prosper under dictatorship. That came very fiercely upon her later, and I think if one reads her later poems one finds that in them.

Political Differences

I might as well finish with some of our experiences with her now, although they came later. I know that after we had moved to Los Gatos and Erskine had been approached to help in the defense of Trotsky, when he had come to Mexico to live, and had said that he couldn't go down to Mexico, his work and his health wouldn't allow that, but that he would go on the brief, she wrote us that this, which she read in the papers, was the saddest day in her life and that she cried very much all day, that we could do such a thing as to help defend a traitor like Trotsky. This shows how much of a fanatical Communist she had become, because of course Trotsky, though with different views from Stalin, had contributed as much toward the revolution almost as Lenin himself had done, and he was Lenin's great friend. The belief that he espoused was that there must be world communism if it was to succeed, and that a great deal of time and effort should be spent on that kind of propaganda, whereas Stalin wanted it all concentrated first on Russia so that it would be a stronghold of communism from which the influences would work. Stalin couldn't stand, as you know, any differing of opinion from his own, and so Trotsky was exiled and came to Mexico, and there he instituted a suit, but Stalin in his relentless hatred of an enemy had him pursued by killers and he was killed in Mexico before the suit ever came off.

Fry: Did Erskine ever write on the brief?

Field: I think he merely lent his name to it, and would have probably done more but for the fact of his [Trotsky's] murder, which came before the brief was really ready. He was pretty busy at this time. He was in the midst of writing books that he had promised, so that at his age he couldn't do everything. He had given so much of his life to defending those who couldn't pay for it and who were the renegades, so called, of society, that it was time for him to be able to feel he could do some of his own creative

Field: work, which was also socially constructive, and not always be begged, as he was, to enter into these local or individual controversies.

You must understand he was a very famous lawyer; he had been on one side or the other of every important admiralty case on the Pacific Coast and was known clear across country as a prominent attorney, and of course it was natural that all the radicals would turn to him for help in time of need. Had he listened to them all he would have been simply swamped.

Fry: The commitment which he had so consciously and earnestly made would have been worthless, the commitment to retire and write poetry.

Field: Yes, it would have been. His mail was piled with requests of all kinds to either lend his voice or his name or his money or whatever else he had to these struggles for social justice, and I must say they always made their appeal to him. But he had to grow adamant about it and refuse most of them.

Fry: Did this strain your friendship with Genevieve Taggard?

Field: Well, as I said, she wrote that it was the saddest day of her life when she saw that he had even lent his name to a brief that dealt with Trotsky. Erskine wrote her back a rather firm letter, saying that one must live and let live, that he shared her hopes for the evolution of society even going farther than she did, because he hoped ultimately that humanity would be ready for philosophical anarchism in which it would need the very least of control, because it would have self control, but that he could never consent or even listen to the wisdom of a system that did not allow men their free voice in government. I don't think that it strained our relations to any point of breaking; there had been too much between us and she felt, I think to the end, a certain tenderness for us.

Later Contacts

When I went back to New York in later years, after Erskine had died, and saw her, she was then teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, and she made it a great point to have me come and talk to the girls of her class and also to come out to Hastings-on-Hudson where I was living with my daughter and her husband, so that we didn't feel that our friendship was broken. We just agreed not to agree, that was all, and left that subject alone.

Field: By this time that I speak of she was married again to Kenneth Durant. He also was a professing Communist, and I think they were very happy together. They bought a very modest little place in Vermont and she wrote many of her poems from there. I believe Dartmouth College is the home of her manuscripts now. She died of hypertension, to the stricken horror of us all, because she seemed to be so vital and so full of matter yet to give to the world.

She helped me to the last on compiling Erskine's poems; he had written so prolifically that I had a hard time choosing. I asked her if she would let me pay her (because of course she was always poor--she had a child to support) if she would help me in a selection, and she did help me. These letters that I had from her toward the end in which we deal with this are precious to me. They're at Huntington, I think.

Fry: She said, in writing for her little autobiographical squib that appears in American Writers, the text that she takes most literally as the objective of government is "I am come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly." Did she not realize what Stalin's program was?

Field: Yes, but I think she had become by this time so fanatically certain that this was the one system that would bring life more abundantly to the people that she either overlooked or wouldn't recognize Stalin's cruelty and the methods he was using to bring about this more abundant life for people; she I think would excuse them on the basis that the end justified the means. She wrote a poem called something like "Our Good Father Stalin," and she seemed to have complete belief. She died before there was any disillusion that I know of.

During the period I am now talking about she went for a year to the island of Mallorca, and wrote a life of Emily Dickinson. In it she acknowledges my help on some of it. I always felt she was wrong on her assumptions that the unknown lover was a cousin of Dickinson's; I am now convinced, as Harvard University researchers are, that he was the minister who was already married and therefore beyond her reach, whom she heard in Philadelphia and who came to see her two or three times. I think all the evidence points to that.

Fry: How did you help her on this?

Field: Oh, we wrote during this time a good deal about her work. I didn't know she was going to speak of my help, but she did. I gave her my reasons for feeling she was wrong about the cousin, and also I objected very much to the fact that she

Field: was making a kind of issue of Emily Dickinson's recluse habits, whereas there was no issue to it. She was just shy and retiring naturally, and I think that she was so dedicated to her poetry that what with the busy life that she was required to live in doing housework (which she tells us about herself) during the day and then writing her poetry by night, her life had to become concentrated, as nearly every creative person's does. I can't remember now all the disagreements we had on the book, but we had many agreements also. And we both loved her poetry dearly. It was Genevieve Taggard who gave me the three precious little volumes that are copies of the first edition of Emily Dickinson's poems that ever came out.

Fry: Did you know Genevieve when she was editor of the UC literary journal, the Occident? That was around 1919.

Field: No, I didn't know her then. She had already graduated when I knew her.

Fry: So you knew her in between the time that she graduated here and the time she went to New York.

Field: Yes, I did, and it was a friendship that continued even after she went to New York. We remained in constant if not too frequent correspondence. It was long enough to make her very dear to us and very appreciative of the fine generous really noble character that she had. She had a leonine courage.

Changes in Personality and Poetic Style

Fry: This delicate fragility of hers--

Field: Well, but you see that it was on a steel frame, and I think it was the steel frame we penetrated, and we loved the combination. She did have this delicate fragility. In old days, before a great sadness came over her, which was natural with the illness of her first husband and then a long period of loneliness before she met Kenneth Durant, she used to have a gay and almost dancing quality; you had the feeling it was hard for her to keep her feet on the ground.

At first her poetry was light and lyrical, and as she became more and more intensely involved in the Communist movement it became more evidently propagandistic and wasn't as popular as I could have thought it would be. She came out once to California on a tour of reading, and she read at the University.

- Field: I said to her then something about her being one of the most important and recognized poets and she said, "Not at all. I'm not." And she seemed quite sad about that, but I didn't probe her further on the subject.
- Fry: What about her changes in poetic form?
- Field: Oh, they were very definite. She lost the lyric character in her poetry and it became much more of the free verse type. Every now and then, because it was in her, a lyrical note would creep up and she'd write an exquisite thing, which as the little brief account of her that you read said, was put to music by some musician.
- Fry: But you did like her traditional lyricism better than her free verse?
- Field: Yes, I did. I think she was born originally to be a lyric poet. That is a dangerous thing to say, because what we're born to be can grow and change and become something else. Up to the very end of life, although it was a short life, though Shelley became more and more interested in world changes and especially in the results of the French Revolution, still he never lost the lyric quality of his verse, and I think Genevieve did.

[end of interview]

XXXIII ROBINSON JEFFERS

[October 4, 1962]

"Disembodied" Meeting

Fry: Sara, how did you and Erskine first meet Robinson Jeffers?

Field: We met him you might say in disembodied form, that is, through his writing and through Erskine's writing, in this way: George Sterling, himself at that time a popular poet in San Francisco, was nevertheless the most generous of men toward other poets; he was always trying to further the work of poets he believed in. He had great admiration both for Erskine's Poet in the Desert and for the first long poem that Jeffers brought out, called Tamar. He had published two other works previously, I should say, one called The Californians and one called Flagons and Apples, but they had not sold well and had not made him any place in poetry.

With the publication of Tamar he was at once recognized by certain critics--I cannot remember all of them, but Mark Van Doren, who was then book editor for The Nation, gave him a very fine write-up, and felt that here had emerged an original poet of importance. At the same time that George Sterling sent us a copy of Tamar, inscribed to Erskine, he must have given Jeffers a copy of The Poet in the Desert, because our copy of Tamar inscribed to Erskine mentions The Poet in the Desert in the inscription [by Jeffers] as one of the noble poems. I think it's very interesting to know the mutual respect these poets had for each other.

As I remember it, the friendship hadn't much chance to grow at that time. I'm not even sure we met him in person at this time, though we may have and it may have slipped my mind. We were in the excitement of preparation for our European trip and this was very much on our minds. But I remember we

- Field: both read Tamar and felt that all the praise that was given it was deserved, though the poem was in a sense distasteful to us. However, we were able to see, I'm glad to say, that the incest of which it relates between brother and sister was a metaphor for the incest which he felt the race was committing, in always feeding on itself instead of the beauty of nature and of all those other things which go to make up the universal whole.
- Fry: You felt this even before you knew Jeffers?
- Field: Oh yes. We felt that even before. We didn't agree with it, but agreement isn't necessary to recognize important poetry, and we did see what he was trying to get at and to a degree we felt its impact, because we ourselves were planning to try to get away, not so much from the problems of humanity as from the pressures of humanity itself on us, which was absorbing too much of our time and of our energy.

We were going over to Italy expecting to find a home for life over there and get away from crowds. We felt crowds always were a menace to one's personal aspect of life. You could not see, you might say, the needs of people if you lived in a crowd. It literally crowded out thought and crowded out all kinds of appreciation of what life as a whole meant. There was no time really to express what we had of artistic expression that was in us, and that was bad. We were always choking it back.

Visits with the Jefferses

I think the meeting with Jeffers came after we went down to Los Gatos to live [after our trip to Europe].

- Fry: In the meantime he had become rather successful, I guess.
- Field: Yes, he'd become quite famous because of Tamar and very controversial. There were many who thought it was anything but a praiseworthy book, so it wasn't altogether a favorable press that he had.
- Fry: How closely were you associated with him after you became acquainted.
- Field: Well, we went to Carmel often in those days; whenever the heat became intense in Los Gatos my husband's heart felt it and we would go down there and stay at a little inn, which has since

Field: I grieve to say burned down, called Peter Pan Inn. It was in the Carmel Highlands. From there we would be driven over to see Jeffers or we would be staying at Noel Sullivan's, and he would let his chauffeur drive us over to see them. I think that Una was always an extremely sociable person and liked what we called social intercourse, but Jeffers always shied away from it. He preferred, if he liked people, for them to come and see him, and then you made an appointment. There was a big sign on the gate from the very first that no one was to come between such and such hours. Una protected that greatly.

Fry: Was this the result of his becoming a known poet?

Field: No. Even before that she didn't want interruptions, even though of course there wouldn't have been at that time so many. But she didn't want any interruptions at all, and that sign was up from the time that we first knew them when he wasn't well known at all.

Fry: You knew them through the thirties, didn't you, Sara?

Field: Yes, we did. We never of course stayed at their house overnight or anything of that sort. When he says, in that letter that you spoke of finding in the Bancroft, that we came by for a week, he means that we were in Carmel for a week. We went on picnics together sometimes, and I have some lovely postcards of all of us on a picnic, of Erskine telling the boys [Donnan and Garth Jeffers] some of his famous Indian stories, which fascinated them.

And Jeffers did come to see us, perhaps altogether in the years three or four times, which was an immense lot because he never went anywhere away from home if he could help it. He was delighted to find that we too had sought solitude and that made a great kinship between us.

Fry: Jeffers and Una had apparently started to go to Europe, too, in search of something. They were going to live in England but were stopped by World War I. This was before you knew them. I guess you had that much in common also.

Field: Yes, we did. We just agreed that you could really appreciate your fellow man more if you didn't live down in the pack. Separating from the herd was a little more conducive to a wiser judgment.

Fry: You did have a social life at The Cats, judging from the letters I've seen, about concerts and plays.

Field: Oh yes.

Fry: This was different from Jeffers' social life?

Field: Yes. He didn't come to many of those things. He didn't care for them. He would come every now and then to a buffet luncheon where we'd sit around the room and have conversation. I remember one such time he came with Mabel Dodge and her Indian husband, [Tony] Luhan, and I remember what an impressive figure the Indian, wrapped in his blanket with his arms folded, made sitting opposite Jeffers, who sat also wrapped--not in a blanket but in almost complete silence. He never ventured a remark himself. He always waited to be asked, and then he would speak in a low voice. He didn't open his lips very well so it was hard to hear him; he spoke with his lips pretty well closed. His slow deliberate manner of answering was extremely impressive because you felt that he was thinking it out; he wasn't answering at the spur of the moment.

Fry: Jeffers didn't like concerts?

Field: She [Una Jeffers] was passionately fond of them and of music generally, and of course he built this room for her in the tower where she had her own little organ and where, with her wonderful hair in two braids down her back, she would sit singing old Irish songs. She was, you know, of Irish descent.

Fry: They both had a great fondness for the country around, didn't they?

Field: Yes, they did. I meant to have checked on whether Jeffers himself had any Irish blood; I don't know whether he did, but certainly if he didn't Una infused it into him. He wrote some beautiful poems about Ireland and she was crazy about these towers they built in Ireland. They went on a trip to Ireland after that one when they had to turn back, largely to visit the places where these towers had been built. The tower he built for her there [at Carmel] was an imitation of the Irish towers.

Fry: After their trip?

Field: Yes.

Fry: Do you think Jeffers shared her love for music?

Field: No. I don't think he cared much for music.

Fry: How close were he and Una in their general outlook on life?

Field: Oh, they were absolutely in deepest agreement. I'll never

Field: forget my shock when I had just finished reading aloud The Good Earth to my husband, and we were both very enthusiastic about it, speaking to Una. She said, "Oh, how could you read that book about those horrible people, all crowded together living in such a messy way. Robin and I couldn't stand reading a book like that." And it gave me a shock at the time, as many times I was shocked by Jeffers' almost unhealthy, it seemed to me, reaction from mankind.

Jeffers' "Inhumanism"

Fry: What he called his "inhumanism"--

Since Jeffers was right there in Carmel, did he take part in the struggle that most of you were involved in between the progress of mankind toward freedom on the one hand and tyranny on the other?

Field: No, he neither took any part in it nor had any use for it at all. It seemed to him that mankind was only clutching at one another's throats and murdering one another, and I think his deep sensitivity about human suffering and killing en masse in general blinded him to the necessity for the sacrifice of mankind all through the centuries, if he were to attain anything like even approximate liberty.

I don't know how he thought that we could live in a world of change without change taking place either for the better or worse, but I would say that he felt that it was taking place on the whole for the worse--not because he would have believed in communism or nazism, but because I think he would say with Lord Russell better red than dead. I think Jeffers really felt that, that we'd better leave each other alone, let things take their course, but not constantly go to war. I think war was just hideous to him.

Fry: Do you think that [Benjamin H.] Lehman was right when he said this w Jeffers' reaction to coming up against the idea of an impersonal nature that really didn't care one way or the other about man's existence. [Coughs]

Field: You're chilly; turn the furnace up some more. I bet you're coming down with a cold.

Fry: That, having to face the prospect of an impersonal universe, this was his way of trying to come to grips with this problem for

Fry: humanity?

Field: No doubt it was--I can't quite figure out how his mind could contemplate the enormous growth of the human race and the [belief] that everyone should go off and live in solitude, just from the point of view of enough land. He didn't seem to measure the fact that space would make it necessary, and that anyway, from the beginning of time, men have tended to flock together in order that they may do things together and perform things together. For instance, how could life be sustained if we didn't have our city life, with factories and other means of giving support to people? He never seemed to have thought that out.

Fry: Jeffers lived a little outside the economic stream, didn't he anyway, because he had an allowance?

Field: Yes. I think that was one of the basic factors, though he might not think so himself, if Jeffers' whole--in the explanation, let's say, of Jeffers' whole strange, really antihuman it was, and yet prohuman too, prohuman in the sense that he couldn't bear men to fight each other and antihuman in the sense that he felt that all that man did in concert tended in the wrong direction. I think that fact that he was born with--not exactly a gold spoon in his mouth but at least a silver spoon (he had a modest income and never had had to earn his own living) accounted somewhat for his point of view.

Fry: The lack of realization of one man's need for another. I was wondering too if along with this searching, do you think he was ever searching for his own identity? He was one of those human beings, whom he despised so much, and one who had first been deeply steeped in philosophy and Greek literature, then had gone to medical school and then to Washington to forestry school. This was before your time with him, but do you think that he was searching for something then, or was simply doing this in order to round out his knowledge?

Field: I think he was searching for a reason for life, a reason for his own life that might be an explanation and a key to the reason for life in general. I don't think it was till he met Una that he really knew what he wanted to do, that that was to live apart and write poetry. I think it was Una who really pointed that way to him. She fell in love with him when they were both in college together. She was already married. When she told her husband that she didn't love him, that she was in love with Jeffers, he insisted that she go and live in England for a year and see if it lasted. It did last. It was then he wrote that first book, which is written to her, largely

Field: love poems, called Flagons and Apples. They are not distinguished, but very interesting, as seeing the beginnings of his own rather melancholy thinking.

Fry: Did you have a chance to get an idea of the sort of religious beliefs they both espoused?

Field: No, I didn't, Chita, because at that time we weren't interested in religious ideas. My husband had long become a pure materialist and I had left the church with a great rebound from its hypocrisy and failure to live up in any way, as I saw it, to what Christ taught. I have never ceased to believe that Christ was one of the great and noble teachers of mankind, but I had ceased to have any orthodox views whatsoever. I believed in something that was of divine love (it was what differed me from Jeffers), but I believed it was a love of a dimension we couldn't understand and that, as the Bible says, it used the devices of wicked men to praise it. I didn't believe in a personal God. I just believed in divine force.

Fry: Did you ever get an idea of what Jeffers felt about God? His writings indicate that he never did simply ignore the question of a God's existing; he never ignored Christ; he hadn't turned his back on the concepts.

Field: No, he hadn't, but he did write Dear Judas, as you know, which was, you might say, an upholding of Judas doing what he believed was right, and of course in my Barabbas I can see that too. I think perhaps it was because I could see that in each case, both in Barabbas's case and in Judas's case, they followed where their deepest belief and reason went, that Jeffers was so kind to my book and wrote that beautiful--I suppose you have to call it "blurb" although it's really almost an introduction to the book. That is purely a way of showing that the way of love, of Christ's idea of love, is greater than the way of using force and violence.

Fry: Jeffers' idea of love--he seemed to have an obsession with self-destructive love, and yet he didn't experience this sort of thing with Una or with other people. Did he?

Field: No, he didn't. I think that what he felt about God and about evolution is very vain in Jeffers. He felt that the race was destroying itself. Well, so do we in many ways, but that doesn't mean humanity is destroying itself. It doesn't mean that whatever underlying force there be, that we can't begin to understand--I think he couldn't distinguish between that and the fate of the white race. I haven't a doubt myself that maybe the white race is destroying itself. But not the human race.

Fry: How did he feel about people of other colors?

Field: Well, I know Una was very antagonistic to them. I don't know whether he followed her in that or not. I think that she would have been apt to have been with the segregationists. Of course, if an individual of another race, let's say Langston Hughes, came along, or Paul Robeson or Roland Hayes, I think if those came along into their lives (and I'm sure Una went to hear them [Robeson and Hayes] sing), that they would have both received them very cordially, because they were individuals. But as a race it seems to me they were judging everything in terms of the white race. He was very much stirred and much approved of that book that had such a vogue for a while, The Decline of the West [by Oswald Spengler].

Fry: He and Una did read quite a bit, didn't they?

Field: Oh, they read enormously.

Fry: What authors and books did they mention?

Field: Oh, they read poets a great deal and they read biography a great deal, showing again that tendency to care about the individual more than the race itself. I know that [William Butler] Yeats became almost their favorite poet, especially the latter period of Yeats's poetry. And when they went to Ireland they visited every single place that Yeats had anything to do with. They visited people who were in that movement for the revival of the Gaelic culture, like Lady [Augusta] Gregory and others.

You ask how close they were in basic philosophy. I would say they were absolutely one.

Jeffers' Religious and Philosophical Views

Fry: After Una died, Jeffers kept her little room in the tower as it was except for clearing out a few things, and one of the things that he wouldn't let anyone touch was a madonna, and some other religious symbols about, which seemed to be from the Catholic faith. His reason for this was that they meant a great deal to Una.

Field: I don't think they meant very much to her religiously. I think they were probably very precious mementoes, and of course they [the Jefferses] were broad enough and cultured enough to care

- Field: for icons. If this madonna was a lovely one Una would have liked it for that reason, and she would also have liked it because it would have certain Irish associations.
- Fry: I suggested that this aesthetic quality might be what gave it value to her, but I understand some of these were just the little plastic things you pick up at a dime store.
- Field: Well, she had a love for those things. To my horror, I can't remember what it was she brought me back from Ireland, but she brought me back some memento that was stolen from me, and I think it was a little crucifix. But she laughed as she gave it to me and said, "Of course you know I just love these little things. They seem so part of the people."
- Fry: It was more of a link with Ireland, then?
- Field: Yes. Of course, who knows the mixed feelings of the human heart. Even after people claim not to have any religion of their own you find them having all kinds of associations with the objects or the people that belong to a faith. At least I found it so in Una. She had several Catholic friends of whom she was extremely fond, and in the same way I think she collected these little things because they represented a mixture of feeling for a religion that had meant so much to her.
- Fry: Do you think Jeffers shared this?
- Field: Only as he shared everything that Una cared for. He would love anything that Una cared for, but just love it for that reason.
- Fry: Since his father was a Presbyterian professor of Biblical literature, did you detect in him any conscious revolting from this or obsession with it?
- Field: No. By the time we met him he seemed to have found what he believed and not to be in any kind of a fight within himself.
- Fry: He was in his late thirties then?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: Did he ever speak of his father or mother to you? They died long before.
- Field: No.
- Fry: Did he have much communion with his astronomer brother at Lick

- Fry: Observatory on top of Mount Hamilton?
- Field: A very friendly relationship. Just how deep the communion went I don't know. I know that his brother visited him often.
- Fry: The astronomical viewpoint of man might be one--
- Field: That would draw them together. It undoubtedly did. But they were both inhibited in speech, and in human contacts generally. I think that when one got to know Jeffers you weren't surprised at the aloofness and coldness that his poetry always seemed to have. The only deep passions that it seems to express are the passions of hate, the negative and darker ones. While you never felt any of that passion of hate when he was alone with an individual who naturally sought him because they had something in common, still you always felt that he never really deeply loved or cared (so that he wanted very much to see them some more) for anyone except Una and maybe his boys. I always had that feeling. And yet he was gentle and in a sense tender. But so he was towards rocks and so he was toward birds, hawks, and all such living beings.
- Fry: So when he spoke of God as all the combined things in the universe, he meant living and nonliving too.
- Field: Definitely so. God was that ALL. It combined what we knew of in space and what was beyond space; it was eternity and infinity.
- Fry: He never did simply say that there is no God.
- Field: Over and over again, if you've read his poetry, he refers to God. I think in one place in his poetry he says something to this effect, that if one could feel as he did about God, he would never again be capable of concentrating on the small issues of life. I think that was it. He lived in this vast, rather cold universe, or place of his own, because it was beyond the universe. One loved him but never felt that one was loved back. He liked you and he was kind, and he did things for you, such as writing that beautiful thing about this book, and he liked you most, I think, as you were impersonal. He was afraid of relationship, except with Una.
- Fry: What about his sons? Did they seem to feel that they had a great deal of security in his love?
- Field: Whether they felt they had a great deal of security or not I don't know, but they certainly didn't seem to have any

- Field: frictions, I think because they too were of the same silent go-it-your-way nature themselves, and they didn't seem to object to the strange way they were brought up, being kept away from all people. They used to talk to each other when they were little boys almost like dolls talking to each other, as if they had some strange language of their own. They grew up of course in a way that many of us would dread to see our children do; they grew up very apart from all human beings. They weren't allowed to go to school. Una, who was very well educated, was their teacher. She did teach them enough to take them far enough, I think, so they could enter, and were allowed to at last, the very last grades of school before college. Not until then. By then their habit of being detached from people was fixed on them.
- Fry: Jeffers apparently did feel very strongly about this idea of living apart.
- Field: Oh, so strongly that when people began to move into his region--which had been barren of any other houses and about which there was no thought of there ever being an influx--when they did he began planting trees all around his place. He planted literally hundreds of trees close together. He had to water each one separately every single day for a long time until they became established themselves. Now their place is just hidden in a jungle, whereas once you saw it off in the distance and you could say, "There is the Jeffers place up there." It's almost completely hidden from view until you get inside the gate.
- Fry: I wanted to know, Sara, what you felt about the strength of Jeffers' feeling; many critics think of his poetry as a little exaggerated, rugged and wild and unbounded, like the California coastline where he lived.
- Field: I think the California coastline where he lived influenced his poetry very much, but not necessarily his thinking--unless it was to deepen it, because of the loneliness of the coast and the beauty of it and you might say the lonely beauty of it. I think that increased all those tendencies that he had, of liking apartness. And also I think from a descriptive point of view it had every kind of influence; many of the descriptions are pure descriptions of the coast of that part of California.
- Fry: Do you think that the criticisms about the lack of restraint and the emotions that come through in his poetry are valid?
- Field: I'm not a critic.
- Fry: I should have known better than to ask a fellow poet! [Laughs]

- Field: He never would discuss his poetry with you. He didn't wish to in any way have a controversy over it.
- Fry: I wondered if he had discussed anything, especially when you wrote of his poem "Solstice."
- Field: No, never was a word spoken about it. Una wrote me at length about it. I hope I can find her letter.

Una Jeffers

In fact, Una corresponded with me a great deal during those years. I have a nice bunch of letters. And when I wrote and asked if I could buy a copy of Flagons and Apples, that I was trying to make a complete set of Jeffers, she wrote me back that she was sending me the last copy except their own: "I would rather you had it than anyone else in the world." That showed how very close we were, and remained so, though with less ability on her part and on mine, too, to see each other with the previous frequency that we had.

- Fry: Her death brought about a great change in Jeffers.
- Field: It brought about his decline. He wrote to my knowledge only one poem after that, and the first part of it is addressed to her and wrings your heart with its pathos. I gave my only copy of that to the Bancroft because they advertised that it was one of the few Jeffers they didn't have. You see, it was printed privately. Noel Sullivan, who was a dear friend and loved them very much, gave me a copy of it; he had had around a hundred printed for Christmas presents, and I was fortunate to receive one. I gave it to Bancroft because I felt it would have a wider reading there, but I miss it out of my library. I often want to go back and read it--although I can hardly ever read that address to Una without agony.
- Fry: Did you see Jeffers much after Una's death?
- Field: I never saw him but twice after her death. I went to visit Noel Sullivan and he drove me there. We had a beautiful but very sad visit, and I had a feeling that my presence saddened him because he knew Una loved me very much. We were much closer than he and I had been. I only tried then to see him just once after that, and then I heard no more. I would get reports from Donnan [Jeffers] and from Noel Sullivan. Noel must have the letters from him.

- Fry: I wish you could describe more what it was in Una that he really depended on her for.
- Field: I think she very often suggested the themes for his poems. For instance, they would go on some trip and they'd see a house that was going to pieces, lonely in its location, and she would say, "There is a location for you to introduce into a poem." I'll have to write this out for you some time and let you interpret it, but I find it hard to talk it out. But it was a very inspirational relationship that they had, that she had, I should say, on him. I think she was probably the inspiration of very many of his poems, in the sense of directing his attention to situations that could suggest them.
- Fry: Do you know of anyone else who was making a study of Jeffers at the time you knew him?
- Field: Yes, I do, darling, but I can't remember their names. There was one man [Lawrence Clark Powell] especially that made quite a long study and who became librarian at one of the libraries in Los Angeles.
- Fry: At UCLA, yes. There's a rumor of some recordings Jeffers made reading his own poetry and perhaps commenting on them at CCNY in New York.
- Field: Well, that might have been on the trip that he made to read at the Congressional Library. He went there once to do it. He would always do these things under great protest, and I think at the urgency of Una. She liked him to do it. She loved him to be known and to be recognized for what she felt he was, a very great poet, and she also loved the gaiety that was attendant on such times.
- Fry: So these were his Library of Congress recordings?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: Do you remember his being in communication with any other scholars?
- Field: No, I wouldn't know about that, but I'm sure he was.
- Fry: What about Melba [Berry] Bennett, who apparently was his official biographer?
- Field: Was she his official biographer?
- Fry: Well, the one who was denoted by him to write his life before

Fry: he died. It's what I understand.

Field: She must have come into his life much later because I don't know anything about her. Are you sure he denoted her?

Fry: I haven't seen the book, but that's what another Jeffers scholar told me. At least he put his blessing on the biography.

Field: I think it's more likely that he was so kindly he would let anybody write anything they wanted to, because my impression is that there has been nobody of any stature, and I don't think she has. I don't know of her at all.

Fry: The impression is she was just a friend, and I thought perhaps you could evaluate how well she knew Jeffers.

Field: No, I don't know anything about her.

Fry: Could you name others who were in the inner circle of the Jeffers?

Field: Well, at one time Mabel Luhan and her husband were, but they had a very unhappy ending of their relationship and I think that one would get a distorted account from Mabel Luhan. I don't know whether she's still even living. She had her famous salon, you know, at Taos, and used to invite all the celebrities there to visit her. She had a very evil reputation for trying to disrupt relationships. As soon as she saw there was a fine and deep relationship between a person she would want to try to break that up; there was some fiendish desire in her. Someone said it was like a house with green pots of poison all around.

I begged Una not to yield to her urgency to go there. Una was not only flattered by being asked to come with Jeffers and the boys, but intrigued because the boys were told they'd each have a horse and they would have a wonderful time on the prairies around there, the plains down there. So she went down. The first summer I think passed pretty well, but the second summer a very near tragedy happened from it. I don't know whether that's been told or whether I have any right to speak of it, but I knew much about it because I happened to be at Noel Sullivan's when it happened and she was brought back. She had tried to shoot herself.

Fry: Una?

Field: Una. Because she thought that Robin was falling in love with some other woman down there. But you'd better look into that; I can't tell you about it accurately. I only know that there was a group of us who knew about it and were troubled deeply. Una

- Field: recovered; she didn't die from her pistol wound, but she was an invalid for a long time.
- Fry: When was this?
- Field: I would say the late thirties, or the early forties, maybe. More likely the early forties. It seems to me it was after Erskine's death. It was a great shock to those of us who knew about it. It was kept pretty quiet, but--
- Fry: Was there a changed relationship between her and Jeffers?
- Field: Not at all. Una had a great deal of jealousy in her nature; she was very suspicious that every woman had her eye on Jeffers. I think it's one reason she loved me; she knew I was so much in love with my own husband that I was indifferent.
- Fry: This implies, Sara, that Mabel Luhan was the other woman in the triangle.
- Field: No, not necessarily so. She had other most attractive people down there. She had plenty of servants; she was immensely wealthy; she was the former wife of the man who had put out one of the famous cars. He had died, I think, and left her with this really immense fortune, and she was a woman always looking for a sensation in life, a new sensation. It was what led her to go down to Taos and marry this Indian. She wanted the new experience. Then she found herself caught, because when she got tired and wanted to divorce him, he told her if she ever divorced him he would kill her. And she knew we would, and she was afraid. He wouldn't give her a divorce. So she was Mabel Luhan to the day--I think she has died, just lately. Her books were very popular. You see, what she did was to get people down there that were well known or that could help her in her plans for writing and write about them. For instance, she had [D.H.] Lawrence and his wife [Freda] there a good deal, up till they had some violent disagreement with her. She would do this sort of thing and it was well known, and that's why I begged Una not to go down there. I said, "Una, don't do it, you'll regret it in time." And she did live to regret it.

Jeffers' Isolation in Carmel

- Fry: Were Lincoln Steffens and Ella Winters very close to them?
- Field: They were pretty close to them.
- Fry: They are mentioned in Steffens' letters.
- Field: Yes. You see, they lived right there and they would go over to see the Jeffers quite often. Benjamin Lehman was never an intimate friend of theirs.

Fry: I don't know the names of anyone else around Carmel in that period.

Field: Well, you see, his isolation, darling, makes it almost impossible to name people who were close to him. They might know Una better, but certainly he didn't have a large circle of close and very dear friends. He didn't need them.

Fry: When you went to his house for a visit, what did you do? You didn't talk all the time, I guess.

Field: Oh, we too loved the sea, and there were things to talk about in relation to the rocks the boys had found, strange and curious shells and rocks, and there were these social problems which Erskine would bring out.

I remember one very amusing experience. Erskine was standing by Jeffers on the shore and Erskine was talking eloquently about his views about social evolution and had gone on for some time. Robin said, "Can you see those white sharks out there?" and Erskine thought, "Oh, he hasn't heard a word I've said." That was his answer to this rather long dissertation. This story came back to Jeffers in some way, that Erskine had told this story and thought it was very funny, and he wrote Erskine a letter about it, a short note, and he said that it wasn't at all because he hadn't been listening, but that he was so moved by what Erskine was saying that he had nothing to answer.

Well, that was the way things were. There was no trouble about the conversation with Una. She was a voracious--excuse the word, she wasn't a bit--she was as talkative as he was silent.

Fry: Do you know what they did for recreation?

Field: Yes. They loved to go into wild places and go on picnics, way up the Big Sur and all around that country. They knew that country perfectly.

Fry: Did you ever go with them to see his favorite caves and rocks?

Field: No. When we went to Carmel it was usually at time when Erskine wasn't feeling very strong. And he also had his work, my dear. He was an important writer himself, and I was writing. We would go down there with our work and sometimes we'd have a little picnic lunch together outside, or we'd go over in the afternoon and have a visit. But we didn't ever intrude; he didn't allow that kind of intrusion on their life by which people stayed hours and hours.

- Fry: To know Jeffers personally then, I would guess that he was a tall, gaunt, and very gentle quiet-spoken man.
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: And the turbulence and forcefulness of emotion that you find in his poetry did not come to the surface on him as a person.
- Field: Never. Never. I never heard him express himself even a little vehemently about anything. You would always think of him as a man almost placid.
- Fry: A kind of a tragic figure?
- Field: In a kind of tragic aspect, because he was so sure that the human race was going into extinction. And yet he loved the race in that aloof way that he had. He loved it by not living near it or seeing it too much. He was really, I would say, a rather tragic figure. He had this love for Una, and she was such a perfect mate for him. She also brought into the world by herself--she brought into his world by herself some of the gaiety that she went out for. She loved to go out and mingle with people; she would go to concerts. He would not go with her, but she'd bring all the results back to him. She was like his feeder, you might say; I think she fed constantly his creative imagination.
- Fry: Does this imply that if Una had never entered his life he would have been in a state of total isolation?
- Field: I don't think anyone could say what would have happened to him, but I think that he might have come near it. He was both too shy and too utterly unique, you might say, to fall in love with any woman. It had to be just the woman, and if ever two people were meant for each other it was those two.
- Fry: In his grief for the human race, he never that you know of tried to resolve this positively? Or to say "therefore we should do this"?
- Field: Well, I think he tried to imply it, that we should live in this apartness, that we shouldn't be so gregarious and so dependent on one another. I think all his poems point not altogether by simple declarative statement but by implication to that.
- Fry: Do you think he ever considered any ism, original or adopted, that might save the human race?
- Field: No.

- Fry: In some of his poetry there recurs a theme of a young wife, like his mother was, married to an older husband, like his father was, and being untrue, usually with a near relative.
- Field: Yes. Always that--either that absolute or near--what's the word I want?--incest.
- Fry: And you felt that this was enlarged then within Jeffers to include the relationship of the human race with itself?
- Field: Oh, I think it was the big symbol of that. I think he made the situation so vivid in itself that people lose sight of what it was really meant to show in its metaphoric sense.
- [end of interview]

XXXIV THE SEARCH FOR A SETTING

[October 10, 1962]

By Ship to Europe

Fry: Sara, I guess you were still living in the Broadway house before your trip to Europe; can you tell us something of the things that made you decide to go to Europe?

Field: Yes, I can; there are several things. The first one was that my husband had never been there. He, who probably knew more about the history of various portions, at least, of Europe and certainly loved Greece and all it had done for civilization, desired very much to see that country. So that was one reason. Then, you see, we had bought this house on Broadway and Taylor because we had to have a larger place to store our books and various things that we had, and also to see whether we could live in San Francisco and find there the balance of time between creative work and social life among literary and musical groups. We had bought a piece of wild property (about thirty acres or a little more) down at Los Gatos, utterly unimproved except for a little shack on it, which we thought we would have in the background in case we couldn't find any other place to go to. But we also had the idea that perhaps in Italy, particularly, we could find a little home in the hills where we could do our work. We also felt that my daughter, who was then about seventeen years old and had graduated from high school, ought to have a year in Europe before she began her college studies. So we had those three things in mind: solitude, the chance for all of us (but especially Erskine) to see a land that he had longed to see and had furnished means for others to see but never gone himself, and the fact of the educational value that it would be to my daughter.

We tried to rent our house and we had a rather amusing experience. Mabel Dodge Luhan, who was then a very famous woman, who had married several times in New York and finally

Field: had married a full-blooded Indian of the Pueblo tribe, had thought that she would like to spend a winter in San Francisco. We had not completely furnished our house, by any means, and when she came up to look at it she was horrified to find what she called "porch" furniture in the living room--straw chairs, bamboo and wicker. Also she kept saying that she hadn't realized how centrally located our house was and how dangerous it would be if Tony--which was the name of her husband--broke out. She used that term several times, "broke out," and I asked if I knew what she meant. She said, "Oh, he just would take it into his head to go away sometimes." And she thought it would be dangerous for him to be doing that around in the city, so she gave up the idea of renting a house in the city. I think she never did.

Well, we were also going to "break out" for this European trip. I was very glad that Katherine's father, my former husband, gave his consent to her going.

Fry: Kay had just graduated from where?

Field: She had just graduated from Berkeley High School.

Fry: This was about 1926?

Field: No, earlier than that. She was born in 1906 and she was then seventeen, so this was about 1923.

Fry: And you left then--?

Field: We had to postpone it for a short time and change our reservations because my husband finally felt he couldn't go to Europe without paying some attention to his sinus trouble, which was very bad, and he went to the hospital for an operation for that. We had planned to go in the fall and it necessitated our leaving in the winter; I think we left in January 1923.

Fry: And you went by boat.

Field: We went by ship, yes. I think you might be interested to know that I had some difficulty getting my passport. We thought that of course Erskine would, because he had been a rebel all his life and had a record.

Fry: He had espoused radical causes.

Field: Yes, he had a long record of espousing radical causes, and I was not only many years younger than he and so wouldn't have had any long record in anything especially, but I did have it in women's suffrage. When I went in to get my passport--you

Field: know they have to send to Washington for it and Washington would stop your record and see if you had paid your income tax and so on--it seemed they didn't like this militant group of young suffragists to which I had belonged. So the man said to me, "I'll have to ask you to come into my private office. I have some questions to ask you." This was in San Francisco, at the Hall of Justice. There's a new one now, of course.

So I went with him into his office, astonished, because Erskine had had no trouble. He'd picked up his with ease, and it seemed so funny that I should be the one to be questioned. But he did question me. He wanted to know what I was going abroad for, and I said, well, I was going abroad for the reason everybody does: I wanted to see the countries and I wanted my young daughter to become acquainted with Europe somewhat before she entered college, and I felt that this was the best time.

He said, "Are you sure you're not going over there to do propaganda? We don't like our citizens to go over there and enrage the people of other countries by stirring up any propaganda."

And I said, "Why, of course I'm not going over for that." But we always had a great laugh afterwards to think that of . the two of us I should have been the one to be questioned and very grudgingly granted my passport.

Fry: Well, maybe Erskine had been purified because of his work as a lawyer for the railroads.

Field: Very likely, very likely. But we finally all had our passports and we left on a very small ship, whose name escapes me. I'll have to find it because it was a famous little ship;* it was the French Line, and there were very few passengers on it, first-class passengers, I mean. It was not only that it was midwinter, but it was also that the ship wasn't built to accommodate any more. We enjoyed the fact that it had so few passengers. We all got acquainted with one another and it was really like having an international convention. There were several nationalities represented among those dozen or fifteen passengers. There were so few that practically all of us sat at the captain's table. The ship I think must have been carrying cargo, too, or it wouldn't have paid.

Fry: It might have been a freighter, then?

Field: No, it wasn't a freighter. I'll ask my daughter about that; her memory will be better as to just what kind of a ship it was.

*The name of the ship was the S.S. Canada. (K.C.)

Fry: Were you and Erskine able to converse in other languages?

Field: Well, I could converse in German quite easily, and my daughter could converse in French, and my husband, who had had a smattering of French at West Point but nothing very thorough, could speak a little French too. But as a matter of fact, English at that time was so widespread that there wasn't much need to resort to other languages. Even the Chinese student who was going over to study at Oxford spoke English. There was a young Japanese on the ship, too, and there were two or three French people. With our combinations of knowledge we all managed to converse very easily.

Fry: Where did your ship first put in?

Field: It first put in at the Azores, just off the coast of Portugal. We got to go ashore and see some of the sights; in fact, we got to go ashore so well that we almost lost our ship.* A group of us hired a conveyance that took us out to one of the old historic castles on the Azores and when we were coming back something happened to the conveyance, and it took the men longer to repair it than we had counted on for our trip. When we got back we saw our ship was practically ready to go. It was blowing its horn and generally scolding everybody for not being there. The captain said afterwards that they wouldn't have left us behind because they would have counted heads and would have even had to turn around and come back, but they certainly hadn't done it yet. We persuaded a bunch of fishermen to take us out to the ship and we got aboard in a way that makes me dizzy now, to think of us climbing up that little rope ladder.

Arrival in Italy

Well, from the Azores we made no further stops till we got to Naples and there the ship landed at its final destination. You can imagine the excitement that my young daughter felt, seeing all these new sights and drinking it all in thirstily, as she has the capacity of doing. We went up to Vesuvius and looked down into the great crater as much as we could; it was still smoking a little and it seemed as if it were liable to have an eruption again at any moment.

Most of my memories all through here now are pretty personal. Some of them are funny. My husband, who rarely got angry, was simply furious at the price that a man up there

*This incident occurred in Lisbon. (K.C.)

Field: charged us for a bottle of wine which he said was of a certain vintage, and when we opened it it was sour and poor and not at all the kind that he'd said. My husband got really angry because the man was so deceptive, and he grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and I think he was going to throw him in--oh, he knew a little Italian too, what you might call bastard Italian. He told the man what he thought about him and the man got so frightened, thinking he was going to throw him down into the crater of this volcano, that he offered to give all the money back.

These were not very historical things, but they were amusing.

We stayed I think two or three days in Naples, although we found it a very different type of city from what we had thought. Its situation is picturesque, but the city itself (at least then) was dirty and crowded and noisy beyond words. One couldn't sleep at night. The sounds weren't all unpleasant--singing as well as loud talking and even shrieking--but even singing becomes a little undesired when it gets to be one, two, and three in the morning. It would be right outside your hotel windows, because they seem to haunt the streets and live on the streets.

Fry: Was this your first impression of the Italian people?

Field: Yes, it was my first impression of the Italian people; I found them always good natured, always with a smile, but never to be trusted. They were extremely dishonest. I think I ought to tell you that when we came steaming into Naples we were so impressed with its likeness to the San Francisco Golden Gate--it's smaller, the great moon of its curve is smaller than San Francisco's Golden Gate, but it has the same quality of beautiful blue water, of course, a sort of almost jewellike blue. We did not intend to stay there long, however, and didn't stay long.

We soon pulled out for the place that we had arranged ahead through friends who had told us about it, to Sorrento. Just outside the town of Sorrento (which itself is a charming town, built around a public square in which people dance at night and have music), there is an old convent that's been made over into a fairly modern hotel. The arrival at this place, which was called Cocumella--all the little rowboats come out to meet the big boats from Naples that come in, and they all have naturally a strong fine-looking young rower who stands up and calls the name of the hotel that he represents. I hesitate to use the word hotel because this

Field: was so unlike a hotel in a way. I shall never forget to my dying day the picture of that brown boy, with his really fine and brawny shoulders from his rowing, standing up and calling, [in a singing tone] "Cocumella! Cocumella!"

The boatman who is calling the name of the place where you are going to stay brings his boat up along the side of the big ship, and you're let down from there into the rowboat and all your baggage follows.

Fry: So you stayed a couple of nights in Naples and then went on to Sorrento?

Field: Yes, but we had to take the ship just the same, from Naples to get into the bay of Sorrento. We planned to make Sorrento our headquarters.

The arrival there was one of the most dramatic events of our lives, because you don't come right to the hotel itself, you come to the foot of a great cliff, and the approach to the hotel, which is a steady climb, is made on rocks carved right out of the cliff. You go through these dark cliff tunnels up these stairs, and then there bursts upon you this lovely orange grove that is the garden of Cocumella. I presume there are other hotels over there that have the same approach, because it's a very clifflike shore along that part.

Fry: It sounds like San Francisco again.

Field: No, there's no such dramatic approach in San Francisco as this was. After years and years had gone by we still speak of it, my daughter and I. I think Erskine wrote a poem about it.

When we got there they were expecting us, because we had made all these arrangements beforehand. We were shown to a most comfortable room. Believe it or not, even in that day they had a central heating establishment, and heaven knows you need it over there especially as you go a little farther north; in Rome it's dreadfully cold, a cold you feel to the very backbone.

Fry: Was this a hotel run by Italians?

Field: Yes indeed, it was. I'm trying to think of the name of the hotel manager. It will come to me. [Signor Carlo. K.C.]

Fry: Did you notice anything about the political situation in Italy at that time?

Field: Yes, we did indeed, especially when we went away from Sorrento

Field: for visits to some other town of city. We would notice on the walls, either anathemas scrawled against Mussolini or approvals of him, very much as over here. And of course in Sicily, which we visited and through whose towns we went, there was really violent feeling against him. I don't remember whether this was in Rome or in one of the towns in Sicily, but it was in one place or the other, that we were attending some kind of entertainment and they burst into a Mussolini song and we refused to rise. The people around us, who were very pro-Mussolini, were very angry with us. We almost got into something. It could have been an international incident. But we just couldn't rise up for him, no matter what would have happened. Later, it passed off as all things do with the Italians as quickly as it had begun, and the entertainment proceeded.

Fry: But in talking with the people you found resentment against him?

Field: Oh yes, a great deal of resentment. It was undoubtedly true that he had done much externally for Italy. People who had lived there--English-speaking people--before and were still living there all spoke of that. There were better roads. Probably you may have heard how emphasized it was that the railroads ran on time, which seems to have been a great feather in his cap over here. Everything that was external was improved. But if there was ever an illustration that it is the inner facts of the suppression of liberty that count, it was there and then that I saw it. You see, the Italian people want always to express their feelings, and the suppression of them from fear which went on during Mussolini's regime was so great as to make it worse, because a suppressed Italian is a sad, volcanic creature, ready to erupt any minute. And of course you'll remember how it finally did erupt. But Signor Carlo's niece, I think it was, who was with us was very angry that we wouldn't get up when the Mussolini song was sung. She was very pro-Mussolini.

Fry: Where did his support come from?

Field: The rich.

Fry: The rich didn't have a very great number, at that time--

Field: Well, no, but they had power. They controlled the army.

Fry: So this convinced you more than ever of the necessity for personal freedom, I suppose.

Field: I think we hardly needed--

- Fry: How could you restrain yourself from stepping into this situation, two old warhorses like yourselves?
- Field: Well, by just living so quietly away from the mainstream of Italian life that we didn't get embroiled but that one time.
- Fry: In going to Italy at this time, were you and Erskine related at all to the horde of American writers and artists who took up residence in Europe to become expatriots?
- Field: No, we weren't. I think we carefully avoided getting in with any kind of group. I really don't know what that period was that they flocked there, hoping for the same thing we did and I think in most cases being disappointed, because we found Europe just as overcrowded as our American cities and countrysides were.
- Fry: And still the great problems of freedom.

Greek Drama in Syracuse

- Field: Yes, indeed. One of our greatest experiences there was going to the Greek plays in Syracuse. It had been the tradition for years and years before World War I to hold these plays annually, and they held them right in the ancient Greek theater that had been cut into the rock, in which Cicero is said to have sat and there's even a legend that Sappho sat there too. Any number of great Greeks and Romans of the early period came to the productions of the plays. And when World War I came they stopped them. There wasn't the money or the young people. They were all caught up in the war. When we got there, after the war ended--World War I had gone on from 1914 in Europe through 1918--it took some years for the devastation that war always produces to be overcome, and this was the first year that they started the Greek plays again. Well, I ought to say that we cared so much that though we had gone to Sicily before the plays were to be given and had learned about them while we were there, we came back again. We couldn't stay the whole time, [for] the interval between hearing about it and the actual production.

We left our daughter in Rome*with the Blue Nuns, who look after young girls, for recompense, for strangers in Italy. And heaven knows they need someone to look after them. But we were so ignorant of the extent to which the young Italian men take advantage, or try to, of innocent girls, that we left

*I went to Sicily with my mother and Col. Wood and saw the Greek plays with them. Later I went ahead, alone, to Rome. (K.C.)

Field: word that she was only to be chaperoned if she went out at night, that she could have her freedom by day. She wanted to explore the city on her own; she had made out her schedule. But she said she wouldn't do it again because she had so much trouble fending off these--

Well, I was talking about the Greek plays. When we were all down there and we heard these plays were going to be given, at such and such a time, we said, "We have to see them." Katherine decided she didn't want to go back, because there were so many other things she wanted to do more, and by this time we had gone to Rome, never giving up our hotel room at Cocumella as our headquarters. From Rome we went back to Sicily, not to make a tour of the islands as we had before, visiting all the places where there had been beautiful Greek temples. Probably the ruins of some of the most beautiful Greek temples are in Sicily.

Fry: These are the plays you wrote about, aren't they?

Field: Yes, two plays: Seven Against Thebes and Antigone. Seven Against Thebes by Aeschylus and Sophocles' Antigone. It [the article] came out in a magazine that has since gone defunct, a magazine called Drama.

We sat, by our own wish, in the higher seats so that we could look down and see the audience as well as the stage. We thought we could hear better up there too, because the acoustics of that theater are simply wonderful. We slipped in unnoticed, of course, and so were much surprised when in the intermission a young Italian officer came up very smartly uniformed and, snapping his heels together and making a salute, said, "Poeta?" to us and I, pointing to Erskine, said, "Si, si." And he said, "E tu," pointing to me. So then they wanted us to come down and meet all the stars. We were so astonished at the naivete with which they wanted to take us right into their inner circle.

Nothing proves to me more, no personal experience could prove to me more while I was over there, what their respect is for any creative person. They didn't know anything about our poetry, Erskine simply looked the poet. He looked so distinguished that he simply attracted this young man's attention and he came up to find out. When he found out that we were both poets and we'd come all the way back from Rome after being in Sicily and visiting that theater empty, he was overwhelmed with pride and joy. In a rush of Italian that I couldn't keep up with he began to tell us about who the people were that were there and would want to meet us and about a great party that was to

Field: be given for the actors. We had difficulty in explaining that we were only going to be there for the duration of the plays and we couldn't stay for anything else.

But don't you think that was quite wonderful? It wasn't anything for us to take to ourselves; the feeling I had was that it was spontaneous proof of something we'd never had over here. Here they made fun of Erskine because he wore his hair a little longer than most men do, and there, recognizing a distinguished-looking person and finding out he was a poet, that was open sesame. We didn't have to be anything else. Of course, we exchanged cards. He hadn't read anything of Erskine's and certainly not of mine, but there they were, wanting to share all the life of the actors [with us].

Fry: You said that he wore a uniform; was he a military man?

Field: Yes, he was a young officer.

Fry: What was his connection with the cast of the play?

Field: Nothing whatever. He was just a very eminent young officer and he was there as one of the visitors and guests.

Fry: I can't quite conceive of a U.S. Marine being interested in this kind of thing. [Laughs]

Field: That's why I tell this story, because it illustrates what we all know, that Europe is--at least it was at that time--saturated with a reverence for creative work, as above money or even birth, although heaven knows they made enough of that. Noble birth meant a great deal to them, also.

No Solitude

Fry: What made you and Erskine decide not to stay in Europe?

Field: We saw we couldn't find any place where we could be sure of solitude. We never went anywhere but we met people who knew us, or, particularly, knew him. We were in despair to get off alone somewhere. I remember at Ravello way up in mountains of Italy where you can't go by auto, it's too steep, you have to take a horse--go with a driver of what we'd call a jitney. Even there, where we thought we had crawled away for a while to be alone, we found people there who knew us.

Fry: Europeans?

Field: No, Americans. They were beginning to crowd in, as the effects of the war wore off.

Fry: Were these for the most part also creative people?

Field: No, not all. Most of them were not. I'll never forget when we got to Ravello and thought we had just left the boundaries of chance travelers or crowds of any kind, finding the little inn to which we had been recommended packed with people. We went out on the arbor in the evening--the arbor stretched way out overlooking the mountains roundabout--and Erskine said to me, "Darling, we're alone at last."

And just then somebody stepped up and said, "If I'm not mistaken this is Colonel Wood, isn't it?"

We were convinced more and more that we would feel the suffocation of too many people; one town almost joins onto another in Italy, and we would have had to have a climate--we couldn't have lived in England, for instance, on account of my husband's health. We were limited by climate, and where the climate was anywhere near possible there were the people.

Fry: So you came back after a year or so, didn't you?

Field: We visited, naturally, the places of supreme interest around there, such as the northern cities where Giotto's great works are. We had saved Greece for the last part of our trip; it was to be the crowning joy especially of my husband and for me too, to be in that land of a civilization that had once given so much to us.

But just as we were ready to go, before it was time to get home and get Katherine to college,*we got a cablegram saying that Erskine's earnings that he'd spent a lifetime on but were paid in lump sums, because--

Fry: Oh, his remuneration from his work with the railroad?

Field: Yes, and as the land money came in Erskine was paid a percentage on all the settlement money and it began to come in after a lifetime of work on this whole matter, and Erskine claimed it was not income, that it was--

Fry: Not annual income.

Field: Not annual income, no, and the government was going to claim it was and would have taken most of what he had away. The cable-

*Originally I was expected to go to the Sorbonne. (K.C.)

Field: gram informed us that was going to be done and he had to go back home to fight it. He knew he could win and he super-intended the whole trial, but we had to cut short our trip.

Fry: This was the case he took up to the Supreme Court?

Field: Yes.

Fry: So you never did get to see Greece. Did you go to France?

Field: Yes. We went there before we settled.

Fry: Did you visit any of the artists or writers?

Field: No. We didn't try to. We weren't there for that. We did go to see Ezra Pound.

Fry: How did you get in to see him?

[end of interview]

XXXV MEETINGS WITH EZRA POUND AND LINCOLN STEFFENS

[November 1, 1962]

Fry: Sara, when you and Erskine went to Europe many of your friends gave you letters of introduction to some very interesting celebrities over there. Were you of a disposition to take advantage of these?

Field: Not very many of them. We were going to Europe for the very purpose of getting away from too many people and the contacts we had had constantly while we lived in the city. Our plan was to find what we thought would be a little town in Italy that we might hide away in and get some of our writing done. We also wanted to do a little visiting now and again, in between times. My husband had never been to Europe and I had never been to Italy, and we naturally wanted to see places like Pompeii and Florence and some of the northern towns where the beautiful frescoes are. With all these things in mind, we felt we wanted to avoid the time-taking effort of meeting too many people.

Ezra Pound

We did see Ezra Pound when we were in Paris, because we had promised Harriet Monroe, who was the editor of Poetry magazine (and with whom he was always having the most delightful literary fights) that we would go to see him. He was an awfully interesting controversial figure and when we went to see him he was just at the place where he was supporting Joyce and determined that Joyce would get published. He'd been turned down by many publishers. I don't remember whether it was at his office or at a bookstore that we bought Joyce's first book, the title of which escapes me--no, Ulysses, I mean. You couldn't get it in America; it was censored over here. This was the first edition. It's only paperback, that's the way it

- Field: was brought out then. Joyce had a regular coterie of people who promoted him. I can't remember anything very profound that Pound said at the time. He was more in a ranting mood about how backward America was, how unreceptive to the new writer, how unaware of what was happening in the revolution, you might say, of writing. I remember he commented very favorably on Erskine's Heavenly Discourse; he said the only thing that was the matter with that was it didn't lampoon America enough. He was very bitter toward our whole culture, or lack of it, over here, felt that he couldn't live over here on that account.
- Fry: Could you give a description of what he was like when you first saw him? Did he have on that famous red ruby earring?
- Field: No, he didn't have it on that day. I remember him as not very distinguished. He was very tall and slim and had, as I remember it, rather reddish brown hair.
- Fry: But he wasn't eccentrically dressed?
- Field: He wasn't eccentrically dressed when we visited him. He probably wasn't very conventionally dressed either, but it wasn't an outstanding eccentricity of dress that we saw at that time.
- Fry: How did you feel about him then, regarding his political and economic ideas?
- Field: Well, we didn't know anything about them, that came later.
- Fry: Mainly then your discussion must have centered around the culture of America?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: I guess one of the questions now is about Pound's sanity, although he's in such poor physical condition now that it's almost a past event. Did you have any indication when you visited him that this man was mentally ill?
- Field: No, not at all. We got a very distinct impression that he was an eccentric and a rebel in every sense, but nothing that didn't seem perfectly sane.

Lincoln Steffens and Ella Winter

- Fry: Would you like to go on to Steffens now?

Field: Well, I think I ought to go backwards a little on Steffens because we knew him so well before we left this country.

Fry: I believe we did talk about him at the McNamara trial, and I suppose Erskine knew him even before that.

Field: Erskine knew him even before that; he had looked Erskine up. He'd gone to see him and he was very much interested in Erskine's philosophy, his philosophical anarchism; I think he had written an article on him, though I'm not sure of that. This was in the years before I even had come out to Portland, during his earlier muckraking days. I didn't meet him until the time of the McNamara case, and there we became firm friends. He came up to see me at the little place in San Francisco, the Eyrie, up many many stairs, and when he got up to the top he was breathless and he said, "Is the Virgin Mary home?" [Laughter]

I said, "Well, you're nice to ask if it's a heavenly body and not another kind."

He said, "No, I would have to descend steps for that."

He was very witty and delightful to be with. He was also very gentle. People might not get that impression from his vigorous attacks on corruption that he made, and later on the falsity of our system, but he was a very gentle man, really.

Fry: His letters sound very quietly gentle.

Field: Yes, they are, and always were. But I think what was interesting in point of what we're talking about in Europe was that having gotten to know him so well over here we had a great surprise in meeting him quite suddenly in Florence. We didn't even know he was abroad, and at the little hotel where we stayed, right on the bank of the river, we came down to breakfast one morning and there across the room at a breakfast table sat Steffens.

We were very happy to meet each other and he was exceedingly happy to be able to tell us about this lovely young woman [Ella Winter] that he'd met in England and with whom he had fallen in love. I ought to say in here that he'd been a widower many years. She was much younger than himself and he felt she was a very adequate companion. She held very liberal views, she'd been educated at one of the labor colleges in London, and altogether he wanted very much for us to meet her and know that they were living together, because she refused marriage. Her views were so against it that she couldn't bring herself to it. He was trying to persuade her to marry him so he could take her back

Field: to America, but she was persistent for a long time. Finally she gave in and did marry him and they came back to America, and then left again to live in Italy where their little boy was born.

Fry: You saw him before Pete was born, then.

Field: Pete was on the way; she was pregnant with Pete, and she feels always very tender about our meeting there at that period because in the few days we were there we saw a great deal of each other. We went to some of the surrounding towns together and we would have tea in the afternoons together at some of the places more or less started by Englishwomen. It was altogether one of the most memorable times for her. She has written and spoken to me about it again and again.

Fry: Do you have her letters, by the way?

Field: Well, in the late years life's been too confusing to me what with the movings and the caring for my husband's papers and now with my illness, and we haven't been writing. She wrote to ask me to tell her everything I could remember about myself and Erskine, and I was too sick at the time. I had just been taken ill when I got this voluminous request and couldn't do it. She's probably dug as much up of it as she wanted for herself.

Fry: She was quite a bit younger, wasn't she?

Field: Yes, quite a bit younger.

Fry: What were they there for? Was Steffens working on his autobiography yet?

Field: I think that he had--

Fry: He seemed to be in the middle of it right after Pete was born.

Field: Well, I think he'd just gone over for a rest and a visit. And also because of a relationship in his life which I think as he doesn't tell about I shouldn't either. But he had loved a former schoolmate of his and he was bewildered at the fact that meeting Ella Winter had pushed this aside and had really made him realize that he wasn't in love with the former schoolmate. He had gone over I think to be with her. (I have to leave this to your discretion to leave as much of this said as should be said.)

I remember when he was writing his autobiography I said to him, "Don't leave out the women in your life." And he wrote

Field: me back a very dear letter and said, "You say don't leave out the women in my life but I have to because I don't understand my own relation to women. You never should write about what you don't understand."

Fry: I remember reading a letter from him in which he was pondering over this very difficult chapter, the one you just mentioned. I don't know whether it came out in the autobiography or not, but he was trying to write it. He refers to her simply by an initial, and he said it was very difficult. Someone else had written him and said, by all means, you have to have this in your autobiography. So he was trying very hard to include this at that point.

But Steffens was not the man-about-Europe type of person.

Field: Oh, not at all. I was trying to think how it was we all met in Paris later. Erskine and I were the only witnesses to their marriage; they were married in the mayor's office of Paris, and we were the only witnesses of the ceremony.* This was so she could get a passport. I think they were on their way home then and we were not, but I'm a little confused as to whether we went to Paris twice. We must have. Or perhaps we took in Paris on our way back home and we remained a while there while they went on to America.

My memory is that we didn't see them again after that until we got back to America. When we moved to The Cats and they moved to Carmel to live we saw a great deal of one another in later years. They were rich contacts always, and Erskine was the one who was asked to speak a few words about him, nothing that wasn't fitting and becoming a man who would [not] want a great eulogy pronounced, at his funeral.

Fry: At the time you were with them in Europe, what sort of things did you enjoy doing together?

Field: Oh, we enjoyed seeing all the wonderful sights of Florence. We felt how dominated it was by a spirit of creativeness. It would be too long to enumerate all the individual places we went to but we took in the very great churches and we went to the little town--it has seven towers, a town of towers, San Gimignano.

It seems to me the most wonderful incident is what I've related--our meeting there and being informed of this great event in his life. It shook him very much and he was very anxious to have us understand. We felt it brought us

*I attended the wedding also. (K.C.)

Field: extremely close together. I think he was so full of that that there wasn't much anecdote aside from this I've told you of, of being at the wedding. The marriage ceremony was very cut and dried, just as cold and judicial as possible. It didn't leave any sense of color on my mind at all. We felt that they weren't happy about the actual ceremony, that she felt not happy because she was forced to it in order to come to America, and he felt her resistance to it. So altogether it didn't leave us--having what you have at most weddings.

Fry: And they had already planned, I believe, to divorce later.

Field: I think that was the understanding, that at any time that it was possible to do it, I think they decided probably that because of the little child that was coming that that was another reason they ought to marry, to legitimize him.

Fry: Was it gay to go around with them, or was it a quiet enjoyment?

Field: Very quiet enjoyment. She was big with child and he was very sober over this situation; the parting with this former school-mate had been exceedingly hard on him. He was unable to understand himself, and that disturbed him very much. So we didn't try--

[end of interview]

XXXVI HOME FROM EUROPE

[November 29, 1962]

Normandy Serendipity

Fry: What did you do in the boat going back to New York?

Field: On the ship going back to New York, which was the French ship, we had a very unexpected and delightful experience. I think it was only the second morning out, perhaps even the first, we woke up to find ourselves, instead of headed towards America, headed back to France, and on inquiry we discovered that one of the furnace fans had failed to work, that there was a great storm raging in the Atlantic close to the United States shore and that they did not dare to proceed without the ship being in perfect order. So we were informed that we would have two or three days back in France before we could proceed. By this time, in the friendly way that passengers have in getting to know each other, we had made the acquaintance of some delightful people, two of them school teachers, who decided to rent a car with us and see something of Normandy, a province of France that I had always wanted to know more about. You hear so much of not only history connected with Normandy, you heard of the Normandy apples, the Normandy ales, the general beauty and charming life there.

So we did rent this car and we took this trip through Normandy, stopping at little stone cottages where we would get draughts of ale, those who liked it, and others get cider, and where we did indeed see some of the great beauty of that delightful and very historically important portion of France. The unexpectedness of this event also acted as a happy stimulus to us because we had not dreamed that we would be able to get this in and we made the most of it. We traveled all over such portions of Normandy as we had time to do and arrived back at the ship shortly before she sailed again, and

Field: then proceeded on to the United States.

Fry: Were these companions of yours in Normandy a couple or two women?

Field: There were two women and a man, and then my husband and my daughter and myself. But we had a good-sized touring car. As I remember it, we took a chauffeur with us. We didn't try to drive ourselves. None of our guests were very good drivers in those days; it was early days for cars, you know.

Fry: And you weren't driving at all, I guess?

Field: No, I wasn't driving then at all. I didn't learn to drive till we got back to America.

New York

Fry: Then you really did get to New York, the second time you started.

Field: Yes, then we really got to New York. Arriving in New York, our first visits naturally were with our family--my sister Mary [Field Parton] and her husband lived there. Her husband [Lemuel Parton] is the man that was then a syndicate writer for several papers in this country. He wrote a column called "What's News?" or "Who's in the News"--I think that was it--and he was, of course, constantly meeting prominent people that were making the news. It was always interesting to go to their house and see people. Some of them now are names that would be utterly unknown, but they were prominent in the news at that time?

Fry: Can you remember anybody specifically?

Field: No, I can't remember anybody. That whole portion of our time is just a memory of gladness to get home. I was particularly glad to see my mother, who was living with my sister at the time. We planned to take her back with us to California and this overshadowed all the memories of these--let's say passing greatness that we met. They were people that rose temporarily into prominence and slipped out again, and I think they would mean hardly a thing today.

Fry: Your mother, as a religious woman, felt no animosity toward Erskine?

Field: No, she didn't. It was to my mother I told the only lie of my

- Field: life, I think, because she was so conventional and so religious that it would have broken her heart to think that we hadn't had a legal marriage. So we told her that Erskine had been able to get his divorce, which of course he had not; and that we'd been married in Europe. That was not true, and we never told it to anyone else. The whole world knew the facts of our life, but I couldn't bring myself to hurt her.
- Fry: And she always thought this was true?
- Field: Yes. And as everybody else assumed the rightness of it there was never any occasion to doubt it.
- Fry: You stayed in New York almost a year, didn't you?
- Field: No, not a year. We stayed several months there, because this case of Erskine's that had brought us home kept us either in New York or Washington; he had to keep near to his lawyers. Also, I had to make plans to get my daughter into college. She was going to the University of Wisconsin and there were all the articles that needed to be bought to equip her well. And so we stayed some time in New York. Also, as I say, we'd go back and forth to Washington.
- Fry: The Sacco-Vanzetti trial was pretty fresh then?
- Field: That case was just on when we were visiting in the East. No-- that must have come later, when we went back to New York because of my mother's death.
- Fry: No, I think that was earlier. Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested in 1920; they were convicted by Judge Webster Thayer in 1921; and then in 1927 Felix Frankfurter's book came out on their innocence. It was a hot issue all this time and I wondered what you found people talking about regarding this in New York?
- Field: Well, I'm confused about this, because in 1920 we were in New York. You're talking about 1925. My daughter first entered the University of Wisconsin--I don't know whether I've explained that she very much wanted to go to an eastern college of higher standing, and we had very early in her life registered her in these colleges.* But when she came to take the college board examination she found (and I found to my dismay and discomfiture) that the public schools here did not prepare the students to take those college boards for the colleges that had a higher standard, and she couldn't pass the examination. This was a very great blow to her because she had been an A student in high school and there had never been any doubt but what she would be able to go wherever she wanted to.

*This is incorrect. I was not registered in any college. (K.C.)

Field: When we found that she would have to enter a state university she decided that though she would like to be near us she didn't want to go to California, because even then it was so large and the classes were so big that you didn't get any real intimate contact with your professors, a thing which she very much desired. Looking over the curricula of all the state colleges, we found that Wisconsin had about the highest standing of any at that time, and had an exceptional faculty, and she decided that she would go there. So it must have been--

Fry: Before you went to Europe?

Field: No, after we came home from Europe.

Fry: So you and Erskine put Kay in the University of Wisconsin. You must not have stayed in New York very long this time, because you had already sent work ahead for your architect and contractors to start The Cats.

Field: We weren't at all disturbed about not being there in the early days because Walter Steilberg, an eminent architect and engineer, was supervising the whole matter. I think, quite to the contrary, we did stay some time. We had to; the case took a long time to get under way, as cases do in court. You know, there are always these delays, and I remember that we made a fairly long visit there. Perhaps we knew we'd have to come back or perhaps we left it in competent hands. But the impression I have is of a fairly long stay, which is probably not true; it was probably the second time, when we came back, that we stayed longer.

Kay meets James Caldwell

Right here, I would like to say about Kay's going to Wisconsin, of course she was an utter stranger going there, so I wrote to the LaFollettes, who were very dear friends of mine politically. Mrs. LaFollette and I had worked together in the suffrage movement and I had of course met her husband and family. I wrote her and said, "My little girl is coming on to college there, she knows nobody. Will you kind of keep a wing under her?" And Mrs. LaFollette wrote me back a charming letter saying she certainly would do so. Well, she kept a wing under her in a way I least expected.

Fry: This is Mrs. Bob LaFollette?

Field: The elder LaFollettes, yes; Mrs. Robert LaFollette, Senior.

Field:

My daughter and I had had a talk about early marriage and early engagements before she went away. I had said to her I hoped she wouldn't walk in my footsteps, that I had, as it were, used marriage as an escape, thinking of course I was in love because I had no experience and didn't know really what being in love was, and that I hoped she wouldn't get embroiled in any kind of serious relationship with any young man until she had had more years of experience. And she promised me very seriously that she wouldn't.

Well, Mrs. LaFollette proceeded to put a wing under her by asking her to a house party one weekend and there she met Jim Caldwell, and I think it was almost love at first sight on both sides. Her letters began to have a note in them that I perceived with a mother's eye of some significance. That Christmas we thought of course she was very lonely and we ought to bring her home the first Christmas that she was away. The minute she got off the train I knew something had happened to her; the look in her face only happens when you are in love. Very little was said then; they hadn't come to any understanding. I think she was trying to live up to the letter of the agreement with me that she wouldn't get into any entanglements, but the evidence was there that the entanglement had taken its own course.

I can remember so well talking with a Scottish woman who was going to marry a widower who had been married to the Scottish woman's best friend; she made no hesitation about saying it was a marriage of convenience, that she just felt his sons needed supervision and that this was something her friend would like her to do and she ought to do it. After she was gone, Kay said to me, "Oh, Mother, how can anyone talk about marriage like that?" And I knew that the significant signs were all there, but fortunately they did put off their marriage till after Jim had finished with his Ph.D.--no, not his Ph.D., until she had gotten her B.A.

She was by this time at Radcliffe. It was very interesting how she finally got into Radcliffe, but I'll tell about that in my next interview. He went to Harvard to take his Ph.D. and during that year she took her master's degree. They had been married the summer before and they both worked on these projects.

Fry:

Just to straighten our chronology: When Kay came home that first Christmas, do you remember whether you met her from the train in San Francisco or--

Field:

Oakland. We were here in the West Coast and we met her in Oakland.

Fry: Then you didn't stay in New York long.

Field: No, we didn't.

Building The Cats

Fry: And you must have had the house at The Cats under way.

Field: Yes, and we were going down often to the little shack which was on the place which we loved very much, staying there and supervising and watching the proceeding of the house. But it took quite a while to build the house, several months.

Fry: How, with the complex order of tastes and the love of beauty that you and Erskine had, did you ever decide on an architect and the kind of house you wanted?

Field: Because Walter Steilberg had the same kind of taste that we did for simplicity and for not making a house that was to be in the hills a common thing. He didn't like houses to try to dominate nature and we didn't either, so the house really seemed to be a part of the whole scene in which it was set. It was all flat-roofed (high ceilings but flat), so that you could walk over the whole top, and it was built on a simple design of an L with two legs.

Fry: Oh yes, an L with a little right-angle leg at each end.

Field: And the patio in between those two Ls, only at the back so that we had perfect privacy. Anyone coming to the front door wouldn't necessarily have to find us if we were in the patio.

Fry: Wasn't there something unusual about the materials?

Field: Well, I think we were the first people (among the first people) to experiment with concrete blocks. I can't say that they proved too successful; they were too leaky. Mr. Steilberg insisted that he had let the water run on them all one night from the house and there's been no leakage, but after the house was built we had a great deal of trouble with leakage. Otherwise, it was a perfect house for us. It was simple, it was spacious; it was remote. It was difficult for people to get there. So we had great satisfaction out of it, though it made a lot of trouble for us too. It became really famous. The sculptor of The Cats--have I told about him, how we happened to have him?

Fry: No.

Field:

Well, before we moved in or went there, a man named Robert Paine, who had helped all the big sculptors (like Saint-Gaudens and men of that stature), but had never had a chance to do a heroic thing on his own, came to us and said that he heard we would very much like to have two mammoth cats at the entrance to our place. The myths or legends about Los Gatos are that in the old days when Fremont was making a road through the mountains they [he and his party] camped where Los Gatos now is and during the night a great number of wildcats from the hills came down to drink at the little Los Gatos River, and that the town got its name from that. There are a great many suggestions how it got named The Cats.

So we thought it would be nice to have two mammoth cats* at the entrance to our place, but we weren't wealthy and we couldn't afford to pay a sculptor for expensive material or expensive wood. But Paine, who was an eccentric--we seemed to gather them around us very easily--and a great lover of his work, said, "If you'll let me try those cats I'll live in the little shack while I do it and I'll work just for day wages." He said an artist should never ask for more, because he's the only man who does work that he's happy in doing and he shouldn't ask to be paid more than a living wage. He had no dependents and could do this.

So he lived in the little shack and assembled all the materials himself. Many of them he found by research; for instance, he found a great cartwheel that had been discarded on the highway some place or other, and brought it up to The Cats for a turntable and made the great clay models on this turntable. It took a year to do the two cats. He did them piecemeal, so to speak, and built them up so that the pieces could be carried down to the entrance, and after the foundations were put in (which were just great blocks of concrete) for them to stand on, then he could bring these pieces down. And also he made them out of poured concrete, which he colored a little himself, which made a material that we could afford. We couldn't afford marble or bronze--in fact, nothing seemed as appropriate as those cats made of concrete and colored, tinted rather, to a very soft pale brown.**

They became so noted that people who were passing through from Europe, traveling in America, would write the Chamber of Commerce and ask who in the world had done those heroic cats, the only monuments they'd ever seen right out on the highway that people could enjoy. That was one of our ideas. We thought if we did that other people would follow in our footsteps and maybe put monuments of importance where they

*Robert Paine chose the subject, modelling the cats from the tame cats he befriended. (K.C.)

**The cats were never ordered colored by Paine or by C.E.S.W., but were often painted as a Halloween prank. (K.C.)

- Field: could be enjoyed by all, instead of hiding them away in parks and museums where you just accidentally come across them.
- Fry: What did he make the mold from?
- Field: Clay.
- Fry: Then he was able to make more than one cat?
- Field: He made two.
- Fry: I mean, had he developed a technique in which an artist could reproduce his work?
- Field: No. He made them each separately. They're two different cats. There are subtle differences. One is half asleep and one is not. They're not on the highway any more, alas. When they put a new highway in (in the fashion of modern progress, so-called), they decided to put the highway lower down and people don't pass the cats as they used to on the way to Santa Cruz. If they don't look up they don't see them. But in the old days when people went a great deal to Monterey and Carmel via the old road they saw them and we had letters sent us through the Chamber of Commerce from people who said their children would insist on getting out and be let pat the big cats. They were eight feet tall, so they were somewhat giantlike to the children.
- Fry: We were dismayed to pass them once and find that someone had thrown buckets of paint over them.
- Field: Oh, that happened again and again on Halloween nights. My husband wrote mighty letters against it in the little paper and threatened even to see about having them moved away if the public wasn't going to be more respectful to them. But I thought that had stopped now. Always the town cleaned them for us.
- Fry: They were clean the next time we were there.
- Field: The town cared about them so much, and I should think they would. Somebody made a fortune on them--we don't know who; they were put on picture post cards and sold by the thousands in the drugstore and other places.
- Fry: What else did Robert Paine do, Sara?
- Field: Well, he was more noted for a machine he made than any other sculpture. This was really his major work. His other things are of much less importance and I don't really know what they

Field: are. But he invented a machine that can enlarge or lessen a statue by certain measurements.

Fry: The machine does the measuring part, when you want to make a duplicate, you mean?

Field: I'm not very clear on the subject, as you see, but it was something of that sort. He's noted for that machine; it is used all the time for enlarging statues or making them smaller.

Fry: Did you notice if anyone else followed your example?

Field: No. We were alone in it.

Fry: Well, not many people can hire an artist even on day wages.

Field: No, that's true. He was a very odd and delightful creature. After we came down and had to live in the shack he moved to another little shack on the place that was really just a roof and some rough board walls, and he used to rig up umbrellas and things over him at night when it rained so that the rain wouldn't come through on him. He could stand any hardship whatsoever. He was a real pioneer. And somehow those cats bear the mark of the rugged character that he was.

Fry: After the statues were finished you and Erskine moved into the little cabin and watched the finishing of your house?

Field: Well, from time to time we did. And at those times he [Robert Paine] would have to go down to this lean-to--it was more like a lean-to than anything else.

Fry: How did they bring the materials for the house up that steep hill?

Field: Well, they had strong horses and brought all the materials up in wagons; everything had to be brought up in that fashion. Of course it couldn't have been done in winter when the road was muddy, but it was done in good times when the road was passable.

Fry: What friends came as it was being built?

Field: Well, I didn't record that so I can't exactly answer it.

Fry: So you moved in. Do you remember having Christmas at The Cats, maybe in 1926?

Field: I remember that we moved in the first year that Jim came out to visit us [July 1926]. After we found out they [Kay and

Field: Jim Caldwell] were very much in love we felt we ought to have a look at him. He came out from Madison, Wisconsin. I think Kay was just finishing her second year at Wisconsin [May 1926].

Fry: So that would make it in 1926.

[end of interview]

SARA BARD FIELD
and
COLONEL C.E.S. WOOD



1920

Photograph by W.E. Dassonville



Photograph by Cedric Wright

XXXVII LIFE IN BALANCE

[March 21, 1963]

First Meeting with Jim Caldwell

Fry: Why don't we get your version of your first meeting with Jim Caldwell, your son-in-law to be?

Field: It was in the summer of 1925, I think possibly 1926, before Kay entered Radcliffe. Erskine and I both felt we wanted to look the young man over who was going to marry our daughter, so Jim came out. I remember his gentle poetic nature, and his face, which revealed itself almost immediately, and I was very favorably impressed with him. There was also something about him that had a little touch of aristocracy about him, without being snobbish, which appealed to us very much.

Fry: Jim mentions being very nervous.

Field: He was so, he told me afterwards, but we weren't aware that he was nervous. He met us on the front steps where we stood waiting for them when we heard the car coming, and certainly the heartiness of our welcome must have undone any nervousness he felt. Whether he was nervous or not, we were not nervous about him; we liked him from the first, and the more he stayed the better we liked him.

We were getting settled at The Cats, and the books had not been properly placed on the shelves. He offered to help me with that, and he did a fine job both organizing the books and putting them in place.

It was particularly important for us to meet Jim at this time because Kay was going to Radcliffe and Jim was going to Harvard, and they were going to see a great deal of each other. We were very happy to be able to have recourse to the references to him from personal knowledge after that. We had a fine time

Field: together that summer. I can't remember that we tried to be unusually--touristy. We stayed pretty much around The Cats as I remember, letting him get fully acquainted with the quality that it had which everybody who came felt.

Fry: Were there other visitors that summer?

Field: Not house visitors. There were undoubtedly many visitors. We introduced them to friends like George Dennison and Frank Ingerson, two really fine artists who were frequently at our house as we were at theirs. And probably to others whom we thought it was important for him to meet.

Fry: Were they the ones you referred to in the letters as "the boys"?

Field: Yes. Everybody in town called them the boys. They lived in a beautiful place of their own called Cathedral Oaks. Just lately quite a big article on them has come out on the importance of their art. It came out in a San Jose paper and has been copied, I understand, in a number of other papers. They had very great distinction, especially George Dennison. He had revived an old form of Greek sculpture done in--

Fry: You mean the baking in the oven after a little bit of sculpture work?

Field: Yes. I know that was one of the things that happened at The Cats.

We discovered that they didn't have a decent kiln. It cost about five hundred dollars to get one, and they didn't have an efficient one. We raised the money among their friends; we had them all to lunch, and presented the kiln to them. In turn, Mr. Dennison made a piece of jewelry in that medium for every person that had contributed.*

Kay Goes to Radcliffe, and to Greece

Fry: Would you like to give us the story of how Kay got into Radcliffe?

Field: It was very difficult. I ought to say that she came back from the continent very dissatisfied. While we were in England she had talked to young men and women who had graduated from English colleges and she had got a very idealistic view of what a college should be, how it would be not only the inspiring

*It was Frank Ingerson who made the jewelry. (K.C.)

Field: curriculum but there would be meetings in the rooms of students. I remember one young student in England telling her how they met and talked about everything, from God to evil-doing, and she didn't find this situation at Wisconsin. There were no such gatherings outside of college, and while she liked the college, the professors, and her work, she didn't feel it was giving her the richness that he had hoped for in college.

She had heard about Radcliffe and what it had to offer, so she wanted very much to go. However, she lacked a certain number of credits, and in order to get [her] in my husband (who was better acquainted in the East than I was because his law cases had taken him on so often) wrote to certain influential people, especially a man named Mr. Storey, a well-known man, who was one of the trustees of Harvard, and asked if he would use his influence to get her in, that he was sure she would make up her credits. She finally, by this method of using the influence of people who could really help her, got into Radcliffe. She was admitted and did make up the credits and she went on with her work, got very high marks. She was a natural-born scholar and she found herself at home at Radcliffe. I don't know whether these ideal meetings that she had heard of in England ever were held, but the richness of the work was such and the contact with the Harvard professors was so enlivening to her that she was very happy there, and especially so because Jim could be there also.

He was taking his Ph.D. at that time at Harvard; he had taken his master's at Wisconsin, after graduating from Princeton, and had gone on to Harvard to get his Ph.D. He also taught while there; he was a tutor, and it was this, with a small amount from us, that they lived on. They lived in a tiny apartment where they entertained, nevertheless, delightful people. They didn't feel at all that they were in too close quarters or that they were deprived of anything, they were so happy in their work and in each other.

Kay graduated, I think, cum laude* and almost immediately she wrote us asking us if we didn't mind if, instead of coming home the summer after her graduation (which, alas, we couldn't attend, for reasons I'll explain later), if she could go on a tour of Greece with some students, especially artists, at the Academy of Rome. We swallowed our disappointment at not seeing her that summer and said, of course, if this would enrich her life she must go. And she did go, and always felt that she gained a great deal from that trip. One of the exciting things that happened was while she was standing listening to a lecture (I think at the Olympia), she felt her cane—which everybody carried—hit something hard, and it proved to be an ancient lamp of the

*Not cum laude. (K.C.)

- Field: very early period. But of course she couldn't keep it. Everything like that had to be given over to the government.
- Fry: You mean the lamp was sitting out somewhere?
- Field: It was down in the earth; she dug it out from the earth.
- Fry: According to the letters in the [Noel] Sullivan collection, this student group was under the direction of Dr. Van Buren from the American Academy of Rome. Which Van Buren was that?*
- Field: I can't tell you. I think the art history Van Buren.
- Fry: You mentioned to Noel [Sullivan] that what you called "his princess" over there was very kind to Kay, introducing her to the people that "she feels will add to her particular interests, and taking her to concerts and so forth which she would otherwise miss." Do you know who this person was? Was she a real princess?
- Field: Yes, she was a real princess, but I grieve to say that, although I met her later (she came over here to this country) and she was wonderful to Kay, I cannot remember her name. My daughter will, though. [She was the Principessa Pignatelli.]
- Fry: Kay came back and she and Jim were married?

Sad Return to New York

- Field: I should say that in between--we had hardly gotten into our house because it took a long time to get settled down in that house, and we had to move back and forth between San Francisco and Los Gatos before we were settled for good there. So it was a shock to us to hear that my mother was very ill in New York, in the summer of 1926. We went on immediately. I was devoted to my mother. At the time it was not long since she had left me in the city house to go and visit this sister, Mary Parton, at whose home she died. When I got there I found that she had caught cold in the kidneys and the situation was very critical and nothing could be done to save her. She died on Thanksgiving Day, to our great sorrow. She wasn't so old, she was in her early seventies.

*Albert William Van Buren, professor of archaeology and librarian, American Academy in Rome.

- Fry: When you went back for that I believe you stayed a little while?
- Field: We did. My husband's income tax case, which he had come home from Europe to settle, still had aspects that kept him there for awhile, and so we stayed on. We went down to visit Kay, then at Radcliffe. She was living in the house of the famous Miss Green.* I was talking to Kay about her the other day. She spoke about what a remarkable woman she was. She was herself a graduate of Radcliffe. Having to earn her living, she did it by taking in Radcliffe girls. Kay was very fortunate to be able to get in there, after having one or two experiences not so pleasant.
- Fry: Was Miss Green famous as a Radcliffe institution?
- Field: Yes, just that. She was a typical Bostonian. Kay loved this, it seemed to be a natural to her. My mother had come from Providence, Rhode Island, and I think she had some inheritance from my mother of very great love of that section of the country because she has always gone back there whenever she could.
- Fry: You were writing a great deal of poetry during this time, and in some letters to Noel [Sullivan] you keep mentioning people--for, instance, when you were called East you mention that John Powys sent his love to Noel. Do you want to go into some of the friends you used to stay with in New York?
- Field: Well, there isn't so much memory of staying with people in New York, because our life just didn't call for that. My memories of John Powys are all out here. He always sought us as a refuge; he liked to hide behind somebody's skirts and get away from the public when he could, because they pursued him quite a good deal, because he was a famous lecturer and of course a famous writer.

Life at The Cats

- Fry: When you went back to The Cats, I guess your life smoothed out a little bit. You weren't called East a great deal for a few years, were you?
- Field: No, we weren't, and our life became just what we had always planned it to be; it became a life of regular hours and regular places to work. We didn't have the studio at that time. It was later we found the necessity for that, but we had (at least in inclement weather) places outdoors where we worked, stone

*Miss Green's only claim to fame was her enrollment at Radcliffe at an early date in its history. (K.C.)

Field: tables that Vincent [Marengo] made for us. I guess we didn't require such comfortable seats; I remember the benches were pretty hard, but we were so absorbed in our work that those little details weren't very important.

But it wasn't too long before we discovered that we couldn't be undisturbed at The Cats, at the actual house, because people, our friends, would hear that we had settled there and they could come in upon us, sometimes without notice, when we right in the the midst of an important piece of work. This made us require a studio away from the house; so we finally built a little studio of just two rooms, separated by a little closet in which we kept material for our frugal lunches, and a little one-burner stove for tea, and also (in the other closet that separated the rooms) there was a washbasin and a water closet.

We both had such respect for creative work that it never occurred to us to go into each other's room, and we just waited until lunchtime and then we had lunch together, and made tea, and had our lunch and went back to work. Or, if we thought we had done all we wanted to that morning, we just gave up the afternoon to some other occupation. But it was an extremely regulated life up there at that studio, which was so far from the house that people couldn't find it. Mary [Marengo] could say to people who came that we weren't home, which we certainly were not, and this protected us a great deal.

Fry: So you had here the isolation you needed?

Field: Yes. During that time that we had the studio I think we did some of our very best writing, before my husband's age and inability to write because of his eyes kept us from going. But that wasn't till very much later. I think that we lived a most satisfactory kind of life, because we balanced our work, and our occupation in writing, with seeing people, by invitation. We had wonderful parties on Erskine's various birthdays. When he reached his seventieth or eightieth, we certainly had memorable times then. The party for his eightieth birthday was one of the most memorable ones, so many artists took part who wanted to contribute. Noel [Sullivan] sang; a little dancer who was quite famous at that time came and danced; one of Erskine's poems was dramatized and Hedwiga Reicher, the daughter of the famous German, took charge of organizing that drama. It was a very beautiful performance.

Fry: What poem was it?

Field: I think the poem was--no, I don't remember now.

- Fry: Did you frequently have informal visits from people in the evenings, Sara, or did you go long periods without seeing someone else?
- Field: Of course, we would have overnight guests every now and then, in fact quite often. We would see them in the evening. Then we would have these parties, often enough. They gave variety and color to the whole scene so people remember The Cats to this day.
- Fry: A friend of mine who went to Cal in the second half of the twenties said that if you really wanted to be one of the select few you had to have an invitation to a weekend party at The Cats. This was a symbol of being one of the chosen few.
- Field: Well, I didn't know we were that choosy, but I do know that we had to--
- Fry: She meant of the entire Cal student body.
- Field: We used to have students come from San Jose [State] College too.
- Fry: Was this largely through Jim and Kay's invitation?
- Field: No, it would be from a professor who would ask if he could bring his class over.
- Fry: For a particular event, like a concert?
- Field: No, for a talk about literature.
- Fry: With you or Erskine giving the talk?
- Field: Both of us. Of course, people whose names are known came or went to The Cats; some of them were Langston Hughes, the great musician Gabrilowitsch, who came down and played a concert for us, and Albert Elkus, who is so well known here--he wasn't married at that time--many times he stayed weekends with us and many times he would give us an informal concert. We would ask a few people in and he would play for us.
- Fry: How did you meet Albert Elkus?
- Field: We met him while we were living in the city, and just how it was we met I can't remember, but he was living in his bachelor apartment on Powell Street, where University Extension was later. When we came back from Europe he gave a very nice party for us--"Come to the Woods and Fields," it said on the invitation. That invitation is sought by specialists in printing today because

Field: it was done by Grabhorn and was very pretty. There's one I think in the library.

Fry: Would you describe your meeting with Langston Hughes?
This is referred to in a letter.

Field: Yes. Langston was a guest at Noel Sullivan's. After Noel [Sullivan] brought his Carmel Valley home, he built a little house for Langston so he would have a place to always feel he could come to and that was his own, and it was there that we met him, and then he came to our house quite often. We saw a good deal of him. He was very much excited about the fact that on his visit to Russia he could earn his own living by his pen there. I don't know why he didn't stay; maybe the authoritarian aspect was too much for him, but while he was there he was very happy. I remember writing to Noel that Erskine and I "think we also will try our fortune in Russia."

Fry: But something kept you at The Cats instead?

Field: Well, that was really just a joke, more or less.

Langston was always modest, withdrawing, a slender serious lad, but happy--one of the happiest people I've ever met, and always enlivened a group that he was in. He had written only his first book of poems when I first met him, and he would read to us at times, but he always had to be urged. He wasn't like some of the people who came to our house, who wanted to sit down and plunge into their own work for us to criticize. We had a good deal of that to deal with, that business of people sending us manuscripts and asking us to examine them and give an opinion. We finally had a card printed saying we couldn't possibly do this and do our work, too.

Fry: Did that help cut it down?

Field: Yes, it did, very much. We had it stated kindly and nicely but it certainly was a problem. It takes time to read a manuscript carefully for serious criticism.

Fry: Did the people who sent them to you come largely from around the Bay Area?

Field: Yes, largely. They were usually friends of friends, but sometimes they came right out of the blue.

Fry: If you saw anything you liked, did you ever act as a sort of informal agent?

Field: No. We didn't ever do anything like that. We never had an agent ourselves.

Colonel Wood: A Brief Portrait

Fry: What was Erskine working on in these early years at The Cats?

Field: His first work was to get his Heavenly Discourse in order. They'd been published now and again in The Masses. He wrote a great many more than he had written for The Masses and made a book of them, which Vanguard Press published. I remember in one letter saying this of him:

My Beloved Companion sits near inscribing some books to his numerous grandchildren. The wonder of him grows always. How tightly-knit, how sea-worthy he is. He never is ravelled, never uncertain in the core of his being. He is like Pericles or Goethe or any of the Olympians who as Goethe has beautifully said, built up the pyramid of their existence. [November 25, 1929]

I think that gives something of the integrity of his life, of that thing that Charles Morgan in his Fountain talks about as "invulnerability." Morgan's character in The Fountain desires this more than anything else; he desires the still spirit. I think in one way my husband, though he entered into many, many social agitations, outraged at injustice or the lack of freedom, he always did it with a kind of passionate surface--it wasn't a deep quality of his nature.

Fry: It was controlled. It was through this still spirit that he attained the invulnerability.

Field: Yes, it was. When, at the end of his life, he became practically blind and troubled with all the afflictions that come to old age, he still retained that-- He died as he had lived, quietly, peacefully. He just went to sleep, and looked like a great god asleep.

I think I gained more from my contact with him than from any other source that I can think of, and that's more than most wives can say about their husbands.

Fry: Do you think his intellectual philosophy or mythology matched this emotional quietude and at-peace that he felt? Because he was an agitator, he was one who wanted change.

- Field: It was because he was a dreamer of a perfect society, certainly of a more perfect society than we have--I think his nature came out of those deep dreams of his. He was a great agitator, but if I can explain it it was an agitation that was done out of his longing for this perfection of society, which of course was a deep source of his dreaming.
- Fry: You wrote a poem of the raven and the swan within your breast. Do you think Erskine ever felt any of this ambivalence, that he was torn by ambiguities in life?
- Field: I don't think anyone goes through life without feeling some of that, because that element that Freud called "the dark mind" is in all of us. But he was less torn than anybody I've ever known.
- Fry: His son died about the same times yours did?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: We have talked about how the death of your son affected you, but we haven't talked about how this affected him.
- Field: Well, it was a deep grief to him, but he had a quality of acceptance of life and all it brings, which I think is the most wonderful gift of spirit that can be had. And so, while he grieved greatly (and set to work immediately to see what he could do for his son's little boys, to help), he did accept the fact that this had happened and that he couldn't change it, by any tears.
- Fry: It didn't adversely affect his mental health, then?
- Field: No, I don't think anything that I ever saw affected his mental health. He seemed to be of the soundest mental health that I've ever contacted.
- Fry: Did his work habits differ much from yours? Was he more, or less, easily disturbed? Or distracted?
- Field: Well, after we had the studio he was perfectly protected, so there wasn't any question of distraction or interruption. Before that, he was disturbed sometimes by people coming in on him. He had to work where they could see him, but he was always kindly and hospitable, though I know it did disturb him. That's why we built the studio. He had tremendous powers of concentration. He could sit in a room--the way Jane Austen said she had written her novels--he could sit in a room where conversation was going on and continue to concentrate on whatever

- Field: subject he was writing about in a way that I envy more than I can say.
- Fry: Did he continue to do any painting at The Cats?
- Field: No. He felt he had to make a choice. At times he yearned to pick up his brushes and his paints again, but he felt that once you're dedicated to an art, you have to-- Especially as he was quite old when he got a chance to leave the law and concentrate on writing, he felt he must concentrate on that and not divide his energies and get diverted by some other gift of his. He was a gifted man in many ways.
- Fry: You told us how thoughtful he was in Portland when you first met him? Was this a sustained virtue throughout his life?
- Field: Oh, he was the most thoughtful person I ever saw. It was so deep a part of him that he never could lose it. He was conscious of other people and their needs, full of tender sympathy if people came to him for consolation.
- Fry: [Laughs] I think of a note, in a letter in the Sullivan collection, he had you add to tell Noel about a particular type of brandy that a friend in San Jose was producing during Prohibition.
- Field: That was another of the wonderful elements in his nature, that with all his efforts to better society, and with his writing and his poetry, he still loved the things of the earth. There was nothing that was good that he did not appreciate.
- Fry: How was it to live with Erskine in a home? Was he the sort of artist who could see only the big things and who could think only in a philosophic way, whose range of vision was so great that it was difficult for him to function in the simpler more mundane inanities of life--like sitting down and eating a meal, or maintaining the gardens and the house.
- Field: Oh, not at all. His adaptation to life, whether it offered itself in small or important ways, was so perfect.
- Fry: Was he able to keep the little practical things going while he concentrated on his work?
- Field: Well, yes, as many of them as he had to.
- Fry: I don't mean the actual performance of routine tasks around the house, because those were done by Mary and Vincent [Marengo], but still the supervision and organization had to be there.

- Field: Well, of course I took a great deal of that off his shoulders. He never, for instance, had to make out a check for a bill. Wherever I could see a person on a matter of mundane concern, I did it if I could to relieve him, because my one great ambition besides my own poetry was to give him all the help I could.
- Fry: This probably meant that you had a little less time to spend on your own work.
- Field: Yes, it did. Because he had illnesses, but then I did too. But when I had an illness or an operation, which occurred I'm sorry to say frequently, he would never leave my bedside. He was just there.
- Fry: You also made trips into the city frequently, and sometimes stayed at Noel's house, is that right?
- Field: Yes, for a long time, until Noel gave up that house, that was our city headquarters. It was on Hyde Street. It was formerly owned by Robert Louis Stevenson's wife.
- Fry: Were you and Erskine able to enjoy jaunts to the city or Carmel as larks?
- Field: Well, it depended on what we were going for, to the doctor or something of that sort, or to do something pleasant.
- Fry: I gather you did make the opera season quite regularly.
- Field: Well, we did for a number of years and then we didn't go any more. Erskine had to cut down his visits to the city and I didn't like to go too much without him. I had to once in a while. For instance, when Robert Frost came to town they gave a dinner and asked Gertrude Atherton to make a speech for the women. She was ill and so they very kindly turned to me as a substitute. He couldn't go up for that. He would much have liked to meet this poet.
- Fry: Could he lose himself and live just for the moment of enjoyment?
- Field: Yes. He felt the present was all we have. We hadn't the past, we hadn't the future, so whatever was happening in the present time, he entered into with his whole being, and if it was a joyous occasion he was certainly one of the liveliest of the spirits there. I say lively; he never was raucous or anything of that sort, but in his rather controlled way he was full of wit and humor.
- Fry: How would you say Erskine appreciated a painting or a beautiful

Fry: spot in the woods? Did it seem to envelope him entirely?

Field: A painting of course he looked upon as a work of art and a beautiful spot in the woods a work of nature. In either case he approached them with a fullness of appreciation, of the artistic work or of just the beauty of nature itself. I went with him to art exhibitions many times. He had a quick eye, and he would look around the room and say, "Now, don't bother about all these things because you'll just come away confused. Look at that well," or "Look at that," and he'd point out special paintings.

[end of interview]

XXXVIII APPRECIATION AND PRACTICE OF POETRY

[May 23, 1963]

Youthful Poetic Experience

Fry: How far back in your childhood can you remember being sensitive to the beauty of poetry?

Field: Well, I evidently was sensitive even younger than I could read it, because my mother told me (I have no memory of this) that she was startled one day to come into the room where I was rocking my little brother to sleep in his cradle, and I was composing a lullaby of my own. She tried to remember whether it was any of the lullabies I'd ever heard, and couldn't remember that it was, so I suppose that was my early attempt to express myself in what you might call poetry, though it was probably a very simple childish rhyme.

Fry: Did your mother read to you childhood rhymes?

Field: I remember reading poems myself as soon as I could read. My mother, poor darling, had too many children to do much reading to us. It was later in life when we read to her that the reading was done.

Fry: I guess in those evening sessions that you told me about. When your father would be out of town on a business trip the children would sit around doing their various projects and you would be reading. Is that what you mean?

Field: I think I didn't have enough encouragement and we didn't have enough books of poetry in the house. We had a great many more prose books, so that I had to find it [poetry] out for myself. But I think I was always sensitive to the poetry that's in some prose. I remember the delight I had when Oscar Wilde's Happy Prince and Other Stories was sent to me, and I read the one

- Field: about the garden that stopped blooming because the owner wouldn't let the children in, and then finally he had this conversion, so to speak, and the children came in and the whole garden burst into bloom. I remember feeling all the qualities of poetry in those stories, and especially that one. I was delighted to have that book. We had a friend in Boston with whom my mother had gone to Quaker school in youth, who had married a wealthy man, and she used to send us these marvelous Christmas boxes, usually with books in them, which delighted me, and I remember this was one of the books that came. I think it was the favorite Christmas present that I had that year.
- Fry: Did you tell me that you lived within walking distance of a library? In Detroit?
- Field: Well, yes. Of course that meant a long walk, about a mile, I suppose, back and forth, coming home with a heavy parcel of books. There was a love in my mother's heart for poetry; when she would sometimes lie down to take a small afternoon rest, I would read to her The Idylls of the King, which she loved. Her taste was naturally Victorian; she loved such poems as Tennyson's. She had a book called Our Favorite Poems, and I'm glad to say I discovered both Shelley and Keats in it. But I had to discover them for myself and find out how superior they were to many of the other poems that had a certain popular favor.
- Fry: I was wondering when you first came upon your Shelley and Keats.
- Field: It was in that book. That is to say, there were selections.
- Fry: Did you ever write poetry that was hidden under the staircase? Did you have your own little soul poems when you were a school-girl?
- Field: Well, I wrote a great many poems which I was wise enough in later years (not too late) to destroy. They were so imperfect. [Laughs]
- Fry: But you did do some writing in Detroit?
- Field: Oh, yes. A little. I didn't think it was any good. I've told you how it took Dr. Lounsbury of Yale to wake up in me the knowledge that I really was a poet.
- Fry: When you had this difficult year in India and Burma, did you write much?
- Field: Not at all. I was picking it up again when we were at Yale. You can see how eager I was to do so because I then had the work of a small baby to care for and I had to teach English to pay

- Field: someone to take care of little Albert while I went to classes.
- Fry: Was it then that you found what meter and themes and so forth was your dish in poetry? Or did you not really select these things until much later?
- Field: I think I selected them much later. I'm quite sure I did. I didn't publish my first book of poems--and they had been in the writing for some time--until I was already in my early thirties.
- Fry: This is The Pale Woman? That came out in 1927, I believe.
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: Were some of those poems from your Yale days?
- Field: A few of them very likely were, but not many.
- Fry: When did you really start writing then, after you and Erskine moved to San Francisco, or did you write during your suffrage activities?
- Field: I believe I began writing some of those poems in The Pale Woman, and others which I destroyed, probably in the days before Erskine and I had been able to get our lives in the conjunction that we wished to, and that would be quite far back. I think I was about twenty-eight or so when I really began to write some poetry that I felt was good enough to keep.
- Fry: This was after you had met Erskine then?
- Field: Yes. I had been helping him with his poetry then for some time, as he described in that letter to Dr. Schwartz.
- Fry: Who did you show your poetry to? To any group?
- Field: I wish I could tell you that I showed it to a good many and got their criticisms, but I was shy about it and more or less kept them to myself. However, when I gathered those poems for The Pale Woman together for a book, I was perfectly astonished that it was taken so soon.

The incident regarding that was of some historical interest. The man who published it was [William Edwin] Rudge. He had been a printer and was convinced that if books were beautifully printed and the contents were passable, they would sell well. I submitted this group of poems to him because my husband [Erskine] and I had a passion at that time for

Field: beautifully printed books. The man who supervised the printing was one of the most famous men in the history of printing; his name I have temporarily forgotten. That book received a good deal of favorable attention. It had both the good and bad reviews that all books have, but I was surprised that it had as good reviews as it did.

Poetic Influences

Fry: When you were writing a poem, under what influence were you? Were you influenced much by poetry publications from the East? Or did you write only from your own development and from your own reading?

Field: That [the latter] was the truth. I think perhaps I made a mistake in having been influenced so much by Professor Lounsbury, because he was not at all in favor of the new verse. He loved Tennyson and Browning; he's written one of the important books on Browning and was noted for his work with Browning and Chaucer. That didn't give him an entree in his own mind to any kind of verse that seemed to be so utterly different from the kind he loved and knew.

Fry: What did you think of the new movements at the time--as represented in the poetry magazines, particularly the imagists and Pound, T. S. Eliot--

Field: I was interested, but not moved.

Fry: Not in terms of your own poetry. You were interested in someone else's?

Field: Yes, very much so, yes and one of those who pioneered. But it was only because I believed a new age was dawning and that poetry should be given utmost freedom of expression.

Fry: Did you say you were one of those who pioneered in it?

Field: Yes.

Fry: You mean in your choice of subject matter and your freedom of meter?

Field: Yes; I was a member of the group, that's what I mean. The whole group found a sort of fellowship. In my verse the new movement showed itself in freedom of subject matter more than in freedom

Field: of rhythm.

Fry: Can you give me a picture of people in this group?

Field: Well, as you say, there was Ezra Pound. He had gone to live abroad because he couldn't bear America. He was very much persecuted over here as to his writings, anyway. People didn't understand them. There was Amy Lowell, who I think was one of our most important poets in the new movement.

Fry: Did you like her poetry?

Field: Some of it, very much. As the years have accumulated I've grown to like some of hers better than I did even then. "Lilacs," for instance, I think is very beautiful.

Fry: Were you familiar with T.S. Eliot?

Field: I wasn't, really.

Fry: No, I don't think he had yet been published much.

What did you think about the selection of poetry in the magazine Poetry at this time? Was it eclectic enough for you?

Field: Yes. Poetry magazine, which was founded by Harriet Monroe, probably has proved to be the longest lived poetry magazine ever started; in that I myself was published. It was very inclusive in its type of poetry.

Fry: How did you come to take Pale Woman to Rudge?

Field: We must have been told about him, or he must have met us in New York when we were living there and perhaps told us of this new experiment he was going to make. I think he approached me. He said, "I know you've written poetry; have you any manuscripts which you would submit?" I said, "Well, I could get enough poems together to make a manuscript." I hadn't any idea that the committee of criticism would accept it. But they did, with a good deal of fervor.

West Coast Poetry

Fry: Do you feel that you and other writers of the West Coast might have had a little more freedom in what you tried to write than Eastern writers, or writers who lived right in New York, where

Fry: the critics were always making themselves felt?

Field: I hadn't thought of that before. As you ask me the question, I would say yes, that was true. I think we did have more freedom out here.

Fry: You didn't feel as much under their thumb?

Field: No, we didn't feel we must write this way. A great deal of the poetry that I suppose any one of the ultra-modern poets of today would call too old-fashioned to be even noticed was being printed in the magazines. In fact, it was looked upon much more favorably in many magazines. But not in Poetry. Poetry was a pioneer magazine. But it was looked upon more favorably than the new verse.

Fry: You feel that those who wrote to please the critics would have written more the old-fashioned kind?

Field: I don't think you write to please anybody except yourself.

Fry: What I mean is the rather subtle influence that critics do exert in New York and which you felt wasn't as strong on the West Coast.

Field: I think the only influence was that probably free verse was held back more than it was advancing in the Middle West and even the East Coast.

Fry: It held it back out here, you mean? Out here in the West?

Field: Yes, because more of it was being published [elsewhere]. While you don't write to be published (at least I don't like to think I ever did), you always hope you've said something that is universal. I have never used the word "I" without hoping that it represented the universal experience. If you felt this way about poetry you wrote this way. But I would hate to think that anyone kept his eye on the critics and not necessarily even [on] publication. You have to be free from thought of any impulse moving in you except the impulse to create.

Fry: I've read some theories about the writers in the West being freer because they are not bound to the Eastern critics. They really are, economically, but they don't have this subtle psychological pressure from the critics, which a writer in Greenwich Village might feel. Another theory was that the West is not as sensitive as the East to the early changes in the avant-garde movements, which usually originate in the East. This would seem to indicate the opposite, that we don't experiment as much out here.

Field: Well, take Josephine Miles, who I think is one of the best of the more modern poets--though she tells me with a laugh that her students consider her old-fashioned now. I was on a committee appointed by the then President Sproul of the University to make an award, the Shelley Award, which had been left by a woman for a young promising poet, and Miss Miles had been in my son-in-law's classes in poetry and he had brought me some of her poems. Believe it or not, she wrote in rhyme in those days, but they were always unique, perhaps almost self-consciously deliberate in their effort to get away from the personal.

Anyway, I'm happy to say I was influential, along with a woman from Radcliffe (there were three of us on the committee), though the [Radcliffe] woman foolishly wanted to give the award to Edwin Markham, who was then an old man and the terms of the award specifically said "young" and promising poet. It was quite a lot for that time, nine hundred dollars, and the woman who had left the award had evidently in mind helping a young poet who might not have enough means to pursue his or her work. So I wrote to this Radcliffe lady and said that I thought the selection of Edwin Markham was contrary to the terms of the award. I said, on the other hand I have read and read the poetry of young poets today and the only one who I can find who I feel answers the description of a young, promising poet is Josephine Miles. She agreed with me. She had taken an M.A. at Radcliffe in American literature, and she said, "Isn't it strange, I've come to the same conclusion myself."

Fry: This was an award given here at the University?

Field: The award was by an Eastern lady--it was a nationwide event.

Fry: I gather that what you're saying is that along with Josephine Miles there were many others out here who were still writing rather old-fashioned poetry?

Field: Yes, a great many others.

Fry: Were there many who were attempting the new poetry, going the way of the imagists or using free verse?

Field: I can't think of any at this time. I think Miss Miles would know, because she remembers this period very well.

Fry: I was more interested in speculation for the reasons rather than the names of those few who might have been forging ahead.

Field: I think it's partly what you say, that new movements usually begin in the East and come westwards, and partly that if you've read deeply in the poets of the past, they are in your system;

Field: it's very difficult not to adopt rhythms that have been adopted for so long.

Innovation in Poetic Content

Fry: You do regard yourself as an innovator?

Field: In content. I have written a few what you might call free verse poems. ("Winter" is an illustration) But I think the contribution I added was freeing poetry--the whole movement was to free poetry, and some freed it in manner of expression and some freed it in content. Poems were written that never could have been written in the Victorian period. For example, "Flight," or a little poem which I think I called--oh well, what I called it is not important.

FryL What was your new subject matter?

Field: I'm glad to say I feel it has been proved right by the explorations of our time. I think my poems dealt with the great question of love; I handled it in a more open and frank way.

Fry: As opposed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom you mentioned a while ago?

Field: Yes. I think her Sonnets from the Portuguese were considered--oh, certainly all through my mother's life and farther on even--as the last word in the expression of love. And yet they aren't all that open and you might say exposed to light as the modern poets--

Fry: Especially in your Pale Woman, I found a lot of this very frank treatment of the love theme. There's some in Darkling Plain. Here what you might call the trials and tribulations of love in the Pale Woman, the agonies that go with it and the parting of the lovers, and so forth, seems to play an important--

Field: That was not just thought of personally. There were parting of lovers all over the world because of the war.

Fry: All of these things here, even the one on people, "A Quiet Soul"--

Field: Those were all published in Poetry.

Fry: And "Spinster." Everyone has known a spinster like this. Did you have a certain one in mind?

- Field: Oh yes, I thought they were representative of types.
- Fry: But you yourself experienced these universal feelings. That was what I wanted to get at, that these were true experiences--
- Field: I lived, darling, through two world wars, and in World War I we had never seen anything like the suffering and sorrow that it caused, so it can't be wondered at that I had a universal feeling about the suffering and (I liked to hope) the joy of life, which I tried to express in poems in The Pale Woman.
- My doctor spoke the other day about my poetry being so sad. Well, I said to him that I thought life has a sad cast to it, that joy was a result of suffering and sorrow in a fruitful way, but that didn't lessen the agonies that you go through to arrive at a time of joy, which is apt to be shortlived, because joy is not a very lasting emotion.
- Fry: I think that comes out in your poem called "Crescendo," which to me speaks of young Albert and his death.
- Field: Yes. And how many sons were dying.
- Fry: This was a part of the universal experience at that time--well, at any time. Yet there is beauty in this. For instance, in this one, "The Great Gift"--
- Field: I hope so. In my feeling about poetry there isn't any use for poetry unless it contains some beauty. I suppose some of the modern young poets would contradict that.
- Fry: Do you have any parts that you would like to read from your short poems before we get to Barabbas?
- Field: I can put those in later. I'd like to think that over.

The Creative Process

- Fry: Is there any one poem that you have chosen to discuss to tell us how you wrote it?
- Field: Only this one you asked about, Barabbas.
- Fry: Is Barabbas typical of the way you wrote your short poems?

Field: Oh, no.

Fry: Was there a poem you would like to read before we discuss Barabbas? You mentioned "We Whom the Dead Have Not Forgiven" recently to me.

Field: I would like to read that one. It's in The Pale Woman. That is a direct growth out of the world war. The statistics were coming in of the deaths of our young men and of the young men on the other side, and I was so horrified by them. War has always been my enemy, one of the things I've fought against. I couldn't get it out of my mind, and I was ill--I've forgotten with what, something that kept me in bed. One night I woke up feeling I was hearing the tramp of all these feet of those who had gone. An incessant tramping that couldn't be stopped, as if it almost augured this war would lead to another war and this would go on and on until we had gained world peace. But in a poem you don't say that. That isn't what you come to. I just wanted to make the impress on people's minds of the horror of war, so I wrote this, almost as it stands. I did some revision of it but nothing like the revision that I've done on other poems. I woke up with it almost written in my mind, in my sleep you might say. The only experience I've ever had of that kind. [Reads]

Fry: Do you feel a poem written that way appears to hang together better than a poem that you have to work out word by word on a more conscious level?

Field: I never had this experience before so I don't know. I think that poem hangs together. All through it you hear this thud of feet. This has been dramatized by Hedwig Reicher. She made one feel that in dramatizing.

Barabbas

Fry: Let's go on to Barabbas. Had you always wanted to write a long narrative poem?

Field: Always, ever since I began writing, but I couldn't think of the theme that would carry me along. Then at one time I thought to myself; I had been brought up in a particularly orthodox, religious way, and I had forsaken that, but that's no reason to forsake the wonder and beauty of portions of the Bible, and certainly the life of Christ. So I'm going to read the Gospels over again.

- Field: I began to read all the Gospel, and I was very struck by the fact that when it came to the trial of Jesus not one of the gospels except St. John spoke of Barabbas in a derogatory way. The others spoke of him as a man who had been taken in insurrection, a notable man, and only John dismisses him with the words, "Barabbas was a robber." Well, the Zealots, to which sect Barabbas belonged, were dedicated to the idea of freeing the Jewish people from the Roman yoke. They were no more robbers than Castro's group would be considered by those who believe in what Castro has done; they simply took arms and hid them. They had no other way of opposing the enemy than by having some stock of arms, so they did take those and hid them in the mountain fastnesses and all such places.
- Fry: How did you come to get on to the fact of the term "robber" being used this way?
- Field: I spoke to Rabbi Newman, and he said that was what they were called by the Romans. Evidently St. John, who was very unworldly and remote from any such thing as a racial insurrection, felt that the reputation given them by the Romans belonged to Barabbas.
- Fry: Were you at The Cats when you began reading the Scriptures?
- Field: Yes, I was. As a little girl we were taken to church on Thanksgiving Day, and every now and then there'd be a new preacher. The morning that I speak of there was a very handsome, dark young preacher. I suppose I was just adolescent enough to have him make an impression on me as a person. He gave his sermon on the fact that Barabbas was a robber. "Now Barabbas was a robber," and he rolled these words out, and it lingered in my memory. I always thought of the trial of Jesus as a very unequal trial between a beautiful and holy person as against a robber, so it was a great surprise to me to find in other gospels whom I had not read attentively enough before other references which did not include anything of that nature.
- Fry: Just as you were taken by Shelley's revolutionary spirit this probably appealed to you in Barabbas too.
- Field: I'm sure it did. Also my instinct gave me the sense of the great contrast between two rebels. As Erskine says in that letter to Dr. Schwarz which I hope can be used in this manuscript, "Jesus was an anarchist." He didn't believe in the rights of another person who was peaceful to invade his peace and tell him what to do, and he was willing to go to the Cross for it. But you can see Matthew saying, "And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas." Luke saying, "Barabbas, who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison." But it was that kind of murder

Field: which people in insurrection always perform.

Fry: How did you go about researching Barabbas?

Field: There wasn't anything on him. As you know there isn't a lot outside Gospels about Jesus, and scholars now say those were written a hundred years after his death. So there was very little to go by on an actual study of Barabbas from history. But I studied the history of the Jews and of the feeling of the time, and the bitter resentment of the Jews that they had to put the Roman emperors' busts in their temples, where they had had only one God, as the people who probably brought us monotheism--I still stick to that in spite of Freud.

Fry: It appeared to me you did a great deal of research on such things as topography of the land, and plants, and you drew very heavily on Middle Eastern nature for your figures of speech.

Field: I thought that was more appropriate.

Fry: I got the feeling that you had visited the place, and gone over it on foot inch by inch, though I know you didn't.

Field: No, I didn't. I wanted to very much. I had to make up for the inability to do it by reading all that I could. For instance, if I was unsure about a certain plant growing in Palestine, I would ask some authority. I'd ask Rabbi Newman, who had been over there, whether he had seen it. He was a great help to me in writing this book. He was a man of much learning and large generosity. He shared all that he could with me. He was very interested in the writing of all this.

Fry: You said you were probably the only living female who had ever read Josephus, and that the boredom nearly killed you.

Field: Oh, it is so long and so boresome, but it gave me a great help. In that it tells about the crucifixion in a very short paragraph, and it says that they released a man called Charabbas, which of course is Barabbas.

Fry: You said that Rabbi Newman verified this point?

Field: Yes, he said it would be natural that names got changed like that. Of course, it's hearsay.

Fry: Would you like to tell about the actual writing of the book?

Field: It was a long and painful process in writing, because there were many interruptions. But when I couldn't work on it because

Field: maybe Erskine was ill or I was ill, or something called us away, it would always be working in my mind. I had pretty well worked out the sense of continuity. Of course, it's sheer imagination to think of his going to Martha's and Mary's house, but I myself liked those scenes very much indeed. But it's not sheer imagination to think that Agrippa, after his sojourn in Rome, where he was brought up as a boy--just as we'd send our children away to other [countries] to colleges to get a broader education (the young aristocrats were sent to Rome for that)--that just as Agrippa came back from Rome, not having lost any of his feeling for Israel, [he] decided that quietly he would do what he could to oppose it [Rome]. It was known that Agrippa was very favorable to some kind of opposition to the Romans. That wasn't imagination at all. It was imagination to work on it. I mean you take up an idea that you get like that and it's so fascinating and of course those scenes between Agrippa and Barabbas are all sheer imagination.

Fry: The confrontation of Jesus and Barabbas is a very deep and moving passage.

Field: Yes, I think so. Having heard of Jesus' power with the multitude and their responses, Barabbas felt so sure that he was the Messiah, in the terms that he conceived the Messiah. And his final enmity, really, because naturally anyone with as strong feeling as Barabbas had for the independence and integrity of his people wouldn't like a man who had the opportunity to be a leader in that just preaching, seeming committed wholly to the world of the spirit.

[end of interview]

XXXIX POEMS, PUBLISHERS, AND A FAITHFUL COUPLE

[May 28, 1963]

The Building of a Poem

Fry: Could you give us a typical poem is built?

Field: A poet goes through very hard work. Anyone who thinks that a poem which has any merit at all is written easily is very mistaken, because a poem is an architectural thing. It's the building of an idea into form, and the idea that is suggested to the mind begins to bring its own symbols and metaphors, and perhaps even its own language. But it has to be very carefully chosen--the ideas have to be carefully chosen, and how the lines will fall, in what manner they will hang together right, which is a very rough expression of what a poem is. But to do that requires much working on, sometimes perhaps days of working and even into the night you are thinking about it. So it is not by any means something to scribble off.

For instance, I wrote this poem for Darkling Plain. It was first suggested to me by the death of a lovely woman who had lived a very holy life, almost, and I had the feeling that she had never had a chance to rest in this world because she had so many children. Then the thought came most of all that death was really a beautiful marriage with the soul, because no one knows what the progeny of it is, no one can say whether there is immortality or not, but whatever comes of it would make a kind of marriage. So this was an attempt to shape that idea. Its secondary name is "Death and the Soul," and here is the way it goes: I won't read it all, but I will show you how the ideas begin to come. They don't always come in the shape that one hears them. But they come to you and then have to be shaped in as perfect shape as you can do.

Field: The full white rose of sleep
 Attends her breast
 Who had no flower to keep
 Before this rest.
 What attar does it spill,
 What spice, what myrrh,
 To pierce her marble chill
 And mix with her?

 If trembling petals rain
 A pollen fresh
 To fertilize a plain
 Beneath her flesh
 No mortal mind has learned
 For the full spread
 Of petals downward turned
 Is toward the dead.

[And, as in deep embrace
 His darling's heart
 Conceals the lover's face
 The world apart,
 The rose's cup is shrined
 From sight of them
 Who stare nor see behind
 Calyx and stem.

 From out a marriage rite
 No eye may see:
 Strange white
 with stranger white,
 What progeny?
 What uncorrupted breath
 In secret stirred?
 What avatar of death?
 What mightier word?]

["Still Marriage," from
The Darkling Plain, p. 21]

You see there is an attempt to carry out constantly the idea of a marriage, and death takes the form of a white flower which lies on her breast and fertilizes her soul in a mystic way. That's a mystical poem. This ranks with the more mystical poems, but whether it's that or any other the idea in all of them has to come first. You can't just say, "I'm going to sit down and write a poem." At least I can't; maybe some poets can. I have to have any idea come to me first, and then build it up. The building process is arduous indeed.

Fry: It's interesting that you find your building materials already lying there, your metaphorical material, your rhythm. You speak

- Fry: of these as being there simply to be discovered and it isn't something you rationally choose.
- Field: I don't think there's any poet living, dear, who could tell you how they come. So that's trying to, you might say, capture the wind. You just don't know how that happens, you feel this process taking place. Maybe the modern poets would disagree with me very greatly and maybe they have a complete idea of a poem from start to finish, but I think even they would have to admit that the idea has to come to them and if you ask them from where you have again asked the impossible question.
- Fry: All of this selection is a deeply intuitive sort of thing, isn't it?
- Field: Well--it's what I suppose makes a poet. It's the quality within them of poetry and the imagination--of course the imagination plays a great part in all of this. Imagination takes the simplest thing, a leaf or a flower, and begins to work on it and can produce a poem out of it.
- [Field finishes reading "Still Marriage."] I chose that not necessarily because it is one of my favorites or one that I think is particularly successful but I think it illustrates my point better than anything else because it is so made up of such difficult and mystical ideas.
- Fry: Yes, and it has a great unity of construction about it.
- Field: Yes, it has a unity of construction. That's a thing that a poet must strive for--unity of construction. I've failed many times, but it's what I did desire to do, and if I am reincarnated as a poet, what I shall still desire to do.
- Fry: Did you ever feel, after you began writing for publication, that you sometimes had to sit down and write when you weren't ready to? Or were you able simply to go about something else until you did feel you could work on your poem?
- Field: Well, I don't know quite what you mean. Of course my life was full of obligations. My husband was not a young man and often needed me for his care, and we had a big house to run and that couldn't be neglected. But I think that our life at The Cats for the most part gave me a very good opportunity, until his breakdown, to write.
- Fry: You were able to write on a fairly regular schedule?
- Field: Oh yes, we did. We'd get up at a good time in the morning and were off to our studio and we didn't come down again, because

- Field: we kept a little supply of food that could be kept up there and had a little electric stove on which we could make tea. So we had a good long day [with intervals of each of us doing as he or she liked, in the way of going out to take a little walk, refresh ourselves, think while walking, and altogether I would say I had, in the years I was doing what writing I did, remarkable freedom.
- Fry: It sounds like an ideal poet's life.
- Field: Well, it was an ideal poet's life, because unlike many poets we didn't forget the world and its troubles. We were concerned about everything that had to do with civil liberties and freedom in general.

The Little Magazines

- Fry: Yes, along that line I noticed that you published for a lot of different kinds of magazines such as The Nation and The New Masses and Oberlin Monthly, also in Equal Rights and little magazines like Measure, Voices, and Harp. Did these editors write to you for the poems or did you send them in? Were these of your choosing?
- Field: I think usually they were. They were sent in and accepted or not as the editor desired.
- Fry: Do you have any comments to make on the various magazines for which you published?
- Field: I very much admired all the efforts of the little magazines, but none of them of course were sufficiently supported by the general public to endure long. It makes my heart ache to think of the many little magazines that came and went. That's why Poetry is so remarkable; it began as a little magazine and it is a stable magazine that seems to endure through all kinds of vicissitudes. No one thought it could endure, after the former editor, Harriet Monroe, died. She died on a trip in the South American mountains, climbing, although she was an elderly woman. After that it seemed as if it would be impossible because she had been such an extraordinary editor, but it went on. It had some good editors. They've changed hands. I think a wealthy woman provides steadily for it or has endowed it, I don't know which. But anyway it seems to get along all right. Perhaps its subscription rate is great enough now. It is the

Field: standard magazine for the poet.

Publication, Publishers, and Poetry

Fry: Do you have any anecdotal material on the vicissitudes of publishing poetry? Did you ever have much trouble getting into print?

Field: Well, I suppose I did, but now that the years have passed it doesn't seem as if it had been very much trouble. The first book certainly was taken by request. That is to say--it was submitted by request, The Pale Woman.

Fry: This was when William Edwin Rudge asked you to send it in?

Field: Of course, it had to go before a committee. I was very happy when it was taken. Naturally you're always excited about the first book. After that you take things more or less easily. [Laughs]

Fry: Did Bennett Cerf come to you?

Field: No. My friend William Rose Benet believed in Barabbas very much, he was strong for it, and he took it to a very fine publishing firm that later went under for lack of funds, Alfred and Charles Boni; they were two brothers. They were delighted with it. They had had a very bad experience with Thornton Wilder's second book, they had made a great deal of money out of his first book--the one about the bridge, The Bridge of San Luis Rey (you must read it). It was an immense success, and had succeeded more or less by word of mouth. The Boni brothers got the idea that a great deal of advertising wasn't too necessary, and as they hadn't any large capital to go on, they did not advertise Barabbas very well. It was reviewed immensely; it got that kind of advertising.

Boni failed just at the time when Barabbas was beginning to sell, and they went out of business. I was very sorry about that, because they were wonderful publishers. They were concerned about every detail of the book; when I suggested the little map at the front of the book, of Palestine as it was at the time of Barabbas, they assented at once and thought it was a fine idea. There was nothing that came up that they weren't willing to listen to.

I started to say that I think they lost their money on Thornton Wilder's next book, which was The Woman of Andros. That didn't sell at all, that they had advertised heavily.

Field: There wasn't enough capital for them to lose so much money on a book and survive.

But when it came to Darkling Plain, that was when Bennett Cerf came along. Darkling Plain came out about four years after Barabbas. He liked it very much. So after a good deal of urgency on William Rose Benet's part, he decided to publish Darkling Plain. Then he did a lovely thing. He asked Grabhorn Press to print it, so it would be in beautiful form, and it is. The marvelous thing is to see what prices were in those days. In this day a Grabhorn book that has any merit at all would be way up. This book sold for two dollars a copy. It was incredible.

Fry: Was Bennett Cerf just as cooperative as the Boni brothers?

Field: Oh, yes. There wasn't as much to cooperate on as with Barabbas. Barabbas presented quite a number of problems in the printing of it, though I can't remember the details now, whereas this was a simpler matter, just printing a bunch of poems.

Fry: Did you get much promotion for Darkling Plain?

Field: Well, not a great deal. Some.

Fry: Not much advertising was done?

Field: I don't think Random House does advertise very much. They're rather reserved about their advertising. But Darkling Plain had a wonderful review in the New York Times, a spread with a picture, and Bennett was delighted with that. I have written him since and asked him if he would consider a revised copy of Barabbas, because there are whole parts of it that I would like to do over, not changing the story in the least but changing the way it is told sometimes. I would especially like to do the trial scene over.

Fry: But not change any of the ideas or the factual detail, just the poetic expression?

Field: Probably more the poetic expression, but also probably there would be a few changes in ideas, too.

Fry: Is there anything else about Barabbas that you would change?

Field: No, I think the rest moves pretty much as I like it. The last part might be revised somewhat; that was a very difficult part to write.

Fry: What sort of changes did publication of these two books make in your life? Were you besieged with requests for lectures?

Field: Not exactly besieged, but there were a good many requests. I was pretty adamant about it. Only once did I read in public, and that was at Paul Elder's. Ben Lehman gave a beautiful introduction and the audience was an extremely appreciative one. I did read some of the poems from The Pale Woman.

But after that I cultivated--or else it just grew in me naturally--such a thorough distaste for poets who went around reading their own poems that I just didn't like to do it. I felt that people could read the poems for themselves and that that was much more effective than reading in public. But I gave a good many talks, lectures, on poetry in general, and especially about Emily Dickinson. Paul Elder's place had a gallery in which they had these lectures, and I think I must have lectured two or three times there on Emily Dickinson's poetry. I loved to do that. Somehow it was a step removed from--

Fry: Who were the important people (important to you, I mean) who helped you with your manuscripts at these times?

Field: There was of course Rabbi Newman. I have mentioned him already. And I shall ever be grateful to the staff of the Stanford Library. They let me come a great deal. Then people sent me many books that they thought might interest me. They knew I was writing this, and were interested, and they sent me books that they thought would bear on my knowledge of the background.

Fry: What about fellow writers? You mentioned William Rose Benet--

Field: Well, I wish now that I had talked over the whole question of poetry more with my fellow poets, but I was way off in Los Gatos, and I didn't get a chance to come out very often, so I never did. [I had the opportunity to talk with] William Rose Benet more than any, because he came to visit us at our house once or twice and stayed a couple of nights. But as I look back now I think it was a mistake; I'd like to ask Jo Miles whether she ever talks her poems over with other poets.

Fry: It isn't clear to me what you think you could have gotten from other poets?

Field: Well, I don't know. You asked me if I'd talked poetry over with other poets. [Laughs] I thought you meant the techniques of poetry. That's what it was. I wish we had talked over the techniques of poetry.

Mary and Vincent Marengo

Fry: Would you like to talk about your neighbors at The Cats?

Field: I'd like to talk about the dear people who took care of us there, Mary and Vincent Marengo, a beautiful name. They made life possible for us up there; we could never have lived up there, with the need for outdoor and indoor help, without that marvelous couple. They just don't come like that any more; they're not even being born. They are just a different race of helpers that come along.

Mary and Vincent had all the qualities that were needed to bolster our lives. Mary was a wonderful cook. In her younger years she was when she came to us, and she never minded how many came in, which most cooks do nowadays. And Vincent was just extraordinary in his capacity to do almost anything. He could do carpentry--I don't mean expert, but very good unprofessional carpentry. He was a good gardener; we had a really beautiful garden there. And he could drive us anywhere we needed to go. So we were completely taken care of by them. And their natures were so--gay, and happy--that is, his nature was. Mary's was not so much so, she had a certain streak of melancholy in her--has, I should say. Vincent was always ready for the laugh, and all his work was done in a sense of pleasure as if he enjoyed doing it. He often says that his years with us were the happiest and most enriching years of his life. I think he learned a good deal with us, and I'm glad to say that we helped Mary, who wanted to get citizenship.

They had both been born in Italy. Vincent came over as a boy of twelve or fourteen, and his father put him to work in the Jesuit college across from us. There he didn't make anything but he got his room and board, and he learned to make wine. So that's how we had our little vineyard on the hill for a long time. He knew the whole process of winemaking. That was one of the charming features of our life there. It gave my husband a particular feeling of joy. His daughter, my stepdaughter Lisa, who is now dead, took a very fine movie of the whole vintage process as we brought the grapes in, and they were crushed for the juice and put in the vats for fermenting. They were really crushed by machinery, but sometimes, because he [Colonel Wood] wanted to do it in the old-fashioned way, [he] would put on boots and get into the big tubs and trample them out. It was a great sight to see him. [Laughs]

Fry: Did Vincent ever help him with the trampling?

Field: No. He thought that part ought to be over with. He was a great worshiper of progress. He felt the machine made it unnecessary to do this. But he very much enjoyed watching my husband do it.

Fry: Was that in the movie that Lisa made?

Field: Yes.

Fry: I wondered if Erskine helped with tending the plants and cutting them?

Field: No. He didn't care about gardening. He cared about the garden, and he loved to look at it and walk in it, but he was not interested at all in doing any actual gardening.

Fry: And Vincent was?

Field: So was I. Often when I had time Vincent and I would work together in the garden. It was great fun to work there. We had an enormous garden. I think we really had more than Vincent ought to have had on his hands. He did all our errands and drove us and did so many other things that were necessary up on a remote place like that.

Fry: Where was the garden?

Field: All around the house. All around.

Fry: Was it a formal garden?

Field: No. It was anything but formal. The only thing that might have looked formal was around where there were retaining walls to hold up a hill at the back of our patio. There we had to have more or less formal plantings because the walls indicated it. Other than that, there wasn't any formal planting. We just had informal planting. I loved it that way, because it looked as it should, as if it really belonged up there in those wild hills.

Fry: Was it primarily native plants?

Field: Well, no, I can't say that. We had those all around us in the outskirts of the garden, but in the garden we had cultivated plants. In the summer we had beautiful beds of zinnia and petunias and stock. We had a lovely rose garden, which is a thing that requires a great deal of care because it has to be constantly sprayed. I have some pictures of it.

There was a great big grove down below the main driveway of rhododendrons. You see, we were in the hills, our place was all a matter of hills, and below the main driveway there was a hollow

Field: which formed a regular Greek theater, shaped just like one. We had seats built and we had hoped to have all kinds of plays there, especially the Greek plays we loved so. We cut out more than our capacities often allowed, but anyway they were there and Kay was married in this grove. It was sown with bulbs of every sort that would grow easily, and they would come up with the rain and we could let the grove go dry in the summer. In September, when Kay was married, the bulbs were over, but the grove was beautiful because we brought in great big pots of delphinium and other plants. It certainly didn't give any impression of bareness.

Fry: Did Mary and Vincent take all your entertaining and your concerts in stride?

Field: I don't think they cared too much for that. You see, they had a house of their own; we felt so much that they wanted their own privacy and that we wanted ours, and yet could mingle as we did. That was the wonder of our relationship, and almost incredible; it was like the old servants you see pictures of in Europe, their heads in with the family in the great paintings, but you don't have any feeling of their not wanting their own life, too. Mary and Vincent were very glad when we decided to build them their little house, which we did right at the gateway. I don't think their taste was cultivated enough for them to come to all our gatherings, and they didn't. They hadn't been exposed to it as children in Italy (as we imagine all children are in Europe), but they did love our friends and our friends loved them and are good to them to this day and go in to see them.

Fry: Where do they live now?

Field: In Los Gatos. We bought them a little house and saw that they had, with their Social Security, enough to live comfortably on. They're not well, either of them. Naturally, they're old.

Fry: They were with you until you left The Cats?

Field: No. That was one of the reasons I had to move. Vincent's health got so bad, his asthma, that he had to leave at least two years before I left, maybe more than that even. I remember the day he came to me with tears in his eyes and said he just couldn't go on, and one could see that, because his breathing was so painful.

Mary decided she wanted to get citizenship, so she went down to school nights to gain what she needed. Vincent would drive her down. Then I would coach her at the house, and finally she felt she was ready. There was a group to be called up for citizenship in San Jose, so we went over the day before and told the judge about her, that she really knew what she should

Field: know, we said, but, "She gets very frightened in public and she is shy and easily embarrassed, so we wanted to ask you if you would bear this in mind in interrogating her." The judge called on her the very first, and the only thing he asked her was what form of government we have. I can hear her little voice saying, "Of the people, by the people, for the people." He said, "Very good." And that's all he asked her.

But what I want to tell about was: we had a big celebration for her, welcoming her as an American citizen. We had all the teachers from the school who had helped her and a few others that she loved, and we had dinner on little tables in the living room, and on every one there was an American flag and the various dishes would come in with American flags in them. We were bound to make people know she was really an American citizen [laughs], and one of my friends played some amusing songs that they would enjoy and understand. She sat at the piano and played and talked, and this was our entertainment for her, which pleased her.

Fry: Were they still with you at Erskine's death?

Field: Yes, and broken-hearted. Thank God they were with me for--I would say at least ten years after that, or nearly so. They couldn't bear to leave me. I really felt I let Vincent go on too long, now, but it's easy enough to see what you shouldn't have done afterwards.

Fry: Your needs were very great.

Field: Yes, very great.

[end of interview]

XL FREMONT OLDER AND RALPH STACKPOLE

[June 13, 1963]

Fremont Older, Friend of Labor

Fry: Sara, you were the editor of Fremont Older's woman's suffrage issue in 1915 right after the Fair. Was this your first contact with Older?

Field: No indeed, far from it. That was a small part of what Older was, and my contact with him. I think we must have met through Clarence Darrow even before I had come down to make my home in California, because I seem to have known him always. What makes me think this, what reinforced it, is that Erskine, who was looking for land already, even then, down here, knew that Older had found a place in the hills of Los Altos, and that it was very beautiful hilly country, good climate, and of course a reasonable distance from San Francisco. So he wrote to Fremont Older and said, "What would you think if Sara and I go in with you and Cora on that land?" Well, as it was a very expensive piece of land and quite a large piece, Older agreed.

We thought the place where we were going to live was settled and that we would live near neighbors. But after a certain time, when Older himself had moved down there and begun to develop the place, it was found there was not enough water for two families, not without doing some very expensive work in wells, and I think by this time Older also had come to feel that with the kind of life an editor of a paper lives, he ought to be free of all close relationships of that kind. So, whatever was the reason--and I think it was truly the lack of water on the place, because later Older spent hundreds of thousands of dollars developing more water for himself--Older wrote us and said that he was sorry, but this was the situation and there was nothing to be done about it but for him to take all the land.

Field:

That settled that; we couldn't go into a kind of joint partnership with him, but we went into a joint partnership with all his views, and his great effort to bring liberal thought to San Francisco. He was with the labor movement in its earliest days of struggle, when it hadn't gotten any of the benefits that it now enjoys. And he was with the great labor leaders in their struggles; he knew them all well and loved them all. There was one who was the head of the seamen's union, the organizer, and he loved the boys of the lowest class of seamanship because he thought they were the worst-treated of all, and he came out very forcefully against the steamship lines. I don't remember his name now [Andrew Furuseth]. He was a devoted friend of Older's and my husband's also. He was approached by some of the authorities at one time and told that he'd better be careful what he was saying and doing, because there were such things as prisons and courts of law and he could be convicted on some point and spend the rest of his life in jail. And this man said (how many times I've heard Older quote this): "I cannot be any lowlier in jail than I have been in my little room in a boarding house. I cannot eat any simpler or worse food than I have eaten in order to live on a very small salary that wouldn't tax my boys, and I cannot have my mouth shut any more in prison than I can outside it, for my voice will be heard no matter where they put me."*

He was a Swede or a Norwegian; you must have run across his name.

Now to come back to Fremont Older, who was a great friend of my sister's, by the way, who married Lemuel Parton. Older was one of the most forceful men that I have ever met. As long as he had his own liberty and rights as a publisher of an independent paper, there was no good cause, no matter how difficult it was to uphold it, that he didn't stand for. I think that Fremont Older was probably noted all over America as the boldest publisher and the men who dared to tell the truth about situations that weren't pleasant, and I feel very sure that he had that reputation because I remember his editorials yet.

I can remember the day that he felt he had to sell out to Hearst and go in with him because he couldn't stand the loss of

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In 1941 a bronze bust of Andrew Furuseth was erected on the San Francisco Embarcadero. He is quoted on the shaft: "You can put me in jail. But you cannot give me narrower quarters than as a seaman I have always had. You cannot give me worse food than I have always eaten. You cannot make me lonelier than I have always been."

Field: money the Bulletin was having. He had bought this place and had great debts to pay, just as later my brother-in-law spoke of it. Well, my husband went down to see him at his office, and when Erskine walked in Older said, "Well, you know that I've become a prostitute, don't you?" And this tells more about his feeling on selling out--even though it was to be a partnership, it was to be called the Call-Bulletin. The Call had been gaining in circulation over the Bulletin, which at one time was probably the most prosperous paper in San Francisco. Older never got over, really, having to make that compromise.

Fry: It really bothered him?

Field: Oh, yes! it bothered him dreadfully, because he didn't have full control of the paper then and Hearst could dictate to him from time to time and tell him that he shouldn't write about certain subjects. This Jack Black story that he was running was a wonderful story of how [a] man can be put back on his feet after a criminal record, if somebody takes enough interest in him, as Older did.

The Olders Befriend Ex-Convicts

I have to say, to Cora Older's glory, that she joined her husband in opening that place to men who were let out of prison. Someone laughingly said that when you go to lunch there you have a murderer waiting on you at the table and a thief helping you with your coat, and in a sense that was true. Murderers are seldom reprieved, of course, but if Older could get them reprieved they would be, and he would take them down on his place and let them work and live there, and be befriended there, because that was the greatest thing of all.

Fry: You mean by others?

Field: Well, I think all Older's friends might have been a little apprehensive about this bold idea, but they supported it.

Fry: Financially?

Field: I don't know whether he raised private funds or not, but of course these people did work on his place, which helped. They did work around the kitchen, and the result was the Olders didn't have to hire expensive help--though it wasn't so expensive in those days.

Fry: How many of these people did he keep around? Was he ever overstaffed?

Field: No, I think he was very careful not to be overstaffed, because if he made a mistake in his idea that this could help a man get on his feet by taking too many, then it would spoil his whole project.

Jack Black was one of the men that he took on his place. He had been a burglar, and didn't hesitate in later life (when under Older's wonderful help he had gotten on his feet and was doing writing of a nature that brought him enough support so that Older didn't have to take care of him) to tell stories about how he learned to keep dogs quiet when he was going to burglarize a house. He was the most amusing table guest I think I have ever met--amusing as any I've ever met, let's put it that way, and Older really was responsible for making that man come into his own, realize his own potentialities. I can't remember the names of his books now but you could find them in the library.

Well, Older was writing the life of Jack Black, who in spite of all his encouragement in writing, had a very depressed side and suddenly disappeared. Nobody knows what happened to him. The thought is that he drowned himself in a way that his body couldn't come to the surface again, and it was after his death that Older was writing this series of stories about his life. Right in the middle of the series, when Older felt he was really explaining a very important point of view about our treatment of released prisoners, he was ordered to stop by John Neylan, who was really in charge of the Call part of the Call-Bulletin and was Hearst's representative.

Older in Bondage to Hearst

After that Older's editorials necessarily had to be less vigorous. My [brother]-in-law's letter, which ought to be inserted here in relation to Older, is correct; he had debts to pay and obligations to meet. He couldn't do anything else but write, you might say, lukewarm editorials. I feel that he lost ground then; he just couldn't quite get hold of himself. It was one of the saddest things; he had been one of the most distinguished editors in the United States. He was much bolder than William Allen White, much as I loved White--I knew him as a friend and I treasure my memory of him. But he didn't speak out with the certain tone that Older used.

Fry: Do you ever remember Older being apprehensive for his life because of stands he took? In his autobiography he mentioned his

- Fry: kidnapping at the hands of railroad representatives.
- Field: Well, that might have left a memory that would go so deep into one's whole nervous system, as fears often do, that he would have been apprehensive, but I think you'd have to have known him to realize how that couldn't frighten him.
- Fry: What was he like?
- Field: He was a big man, and shaggy. I always used to say you wanted to ruffle his hair and say, "there, there," to him, because he seemed like a great Newfoundland dog. He had a warm approach to people; he loved people.
- Fry: Was his manner gentle, or was it blustery?
- Field: Well, it was strong, it was never maudlin, but it wasn't blustery, not to his friends. He prized his friends very highly, those who were truly his friends. We were at his place quite often until we settled down to really do our work with vigor, and they came over to us often. They were always at any of the larger parties and enjoyed them very much. We didn't have time for individual visits, on either side. He was in town at his desk all day, and weekends he'd be tired.
- Fry: Did he really commute daily?
- Field: Every day. I rode many times on the train with him when I went up to town or back.
- Fry: Many of the papers left in Bancroft Library on Older have left the impression that he was very happy with his arrangement with Hearst. Was he trying to--?
- Field: Who would have given those papers? Are they from his own letters?
- Fry: No.
- Field: Well, he put the best face possible on a situation he had been unable to avoid, but my recollection is that he never failed to refer to it bitterly. Maybe that's because he loved us and he knew he could say things to us. I ask you, who could be happy with Mr. Neylan telling you where to get off? He was Hearst's voice. My brother-in-law felt, and others (like George West, who was one of the writers on Older's paper for years) all felt that Older was another man after this arrangement had been made. He wasn't inwardly happy.
- Fry: He was getting up in years, too; in the twenties he was in his

Fry: seventies.

Field: Yes, but as long as he was in control of the Bulletin, as someone said, he roared out of the Bulletin window at the public. He was a great lion for the causes he believed in.

He tried to support the Mooney case all the way through, and of course as long as he had any say in the matter he could do it, but later we noticed that his editorials became, well, simply comments on what was going on in connection with the Mooney proceedings, instead of being fiery denunciations of the illegality of it. Much more neutral and sometimes not even that. I remember, for instance, when Erskine went over on a rainy, rainy night--and he not young, too--to San Jose to speak at a special Mooney meeting, and the next day Older had an editorial on his being there. But that's all it was about, that there was someone of his stature who cared enough to go out on a rainy night at his age and speak in behalf of Mooney. He didn't say what he felt. It was that kind of writing that disturbed people later.

Fry: Your brother-in-law mentions in his letter [1926] that he had heard from friends in San Francisco that Older was just about his old self again, but then he had understood from the friends at Los Gatos that Older really had had the props knocked out from under him. Why would there be this disparity between the stories from San Francisco and the stories from Los Gatos?

Field: I think because he was at first given the impression that he was to have much more authority in the way the paper was to be run than he was later given. Neylan grew more and more autocratic--as you can see by his ordering that story of Jack Black stopped right in the midst of it.

Fry: He took out some of Older's helpers, too; did George West fall under the ax too?

Field: Yes, and went East. He later came back to become editor of the News.

Fry: You lived close to the Wests, didn't you, in Los Gatos, as well as to the Olders?

Field: Not to George West; his wife that was to be lived close to us; their marriage lasted, alas, only eight years. He died of a sudden heart attack. She couldn't even get a doctor up there.

Fry: What about Older's death?

Field: He died of a heart attack too. He and his wife were driving, and

Field: he fortunately must have felt it coming on because he drove over to the curb just in time, and died there.

Fry: Was this at a time when he was under any undue strain?

Field: He was always under undue strain after this arrangement he'd made with Hearst.

We settled down to hard work and we saw less and less of them as we got very busy. And, as I told you, they were very busy; so I can't say whether he worked harder. I think he probably didn't, because no man worked so hard as he when he was editor of the Bulletin.

Ralph Stackpole

Fry: I'd like to ask you some questions about Ralph Stackpole, the sculptor, before he went to Paris.

Field: We knew him as a very young man, and yet in fairly early days he began to make his mark. He did those figures on the stock exchange, and he was asked to do some very important work for the Panama-Pacific World's Fair Exposition, in one of the beautiful courts that was a part of that exhibition--and let me just pause to say that there never was such a beautiful exhibition; we'd never had one like it and never will again. It was a work of art from start to finish. In one of the courts, where the fountains played and the lights were adjusted to all that was there, Ralph Stackpole had some very important figures. He also did a good deal of work for us. He and his little French wife used to come down to see us even when we were living in the cabin, before the house was built. They loved that kind of living, that sort of bohemian living, and it was on one of those visits that he did that charming crayon portrait of Erskine. I think that is one of the best, because it shows Erskine's delicious humor.

He also did a bas-relief of me, and I don't know where it is now.* I haven't anyone who takes as careful thought of those things for me as I did for Erskine, you see, so I can't tell you what's become of it. Then he did a beautiful bust--I think it was in his best period, before he fell under the influence of the famous Mexican painter, Rivera. He studied under Rivera for awhile, and both Erskine and I, and other artists too, felt that he damaged his work, in a way. It took some quality that was his own away and gave it a kind of quality of Rivera that didn't

*The bas-relief of Sara Bard Field referred to here is mine and is displayed in my front hall. (K.C.)

Field: belong. He was like those poets who feel their style or their way of writing is out of style, and try to write in a new way, and don't quite succeed.

Fry: What were he and his wife like, as guests?

Field: Well, she was a small dark girl--she was only a girl--who was so French that it makes me smile just to think about it, because all her domestic impulses were those of a French housewife. She made all his clothes, she could do tailor work, she could do anything in the way of sewing, or cooking, or housework of any kind. He was just as opposite in looks; he was slight and fair and very agile--he would have to be, to climb up ladders and scaffoldings as he had to on his great statues, and he had a lovely sense of humor. He never liked to explain what anything that he did meant. I remember being so bold, not knowing this characteristic of his, to ask him what the statues in the Exposition meant, and he said, "What do they mean to you?" This was when I was sitting for him at one time for this bas-relief.

He said, "Do you like to be asked what a poem you write means?"

I said, "No. I want it to mean whatever it means to the reader."

And he said, "Well, I think sculpture is the same way."

Very soon after this he went to Paris to live, and he never returned. We miss him as a friend very much. They lived for quite a long time on Telegraph Hill, and they were very anxious to go to France to live, especially she. They could live for much less over there.

Fry: Did they remain married?

Field: Oh, yes. His first marriage went to pieces, and then he married her. This one has held true.

Fry: From the time you first knew him, was he supporting himself with his sculpture then?

Field: He made an effort to. He had friends who believed in him. I don't know all of them, but I know Helen and Ainsley Salz were great friends of his, and I have no doubt that since they were well-to-do they did a great deal for him. I haven't any ground for that, but I have that feeling.

Fry: What about his other friends, besides you and Erskine?

- Field: Erskine and I were always busy, darling. I just remember that all of us were grieved that he felt it necessary to go and study with Rivera, because we felt he had an expression of his own. That beautiful bust in the library of George Sterling was done by him, and when you look at that bust of Kay in our front hall, I think it's one of the most expressive heads of a young fourteen-year-old girl--that's all she was, with curls down her back--that I know of. After that I think he resented this in himself, there was a certain delicacy about his work that he lost and I think that he probably deliberately lost. I think he thought Rivera's work was strong sculpture.
- Fry: Did he have an outlook on society like yours and Erskine's?
- Field: If he did, he didn't talk about it. He was too wrapped up in his art.
- Fry: Would you say that he was accepted as an artist by San Francisco, a kind of a local celebrity?
- Field: He was accepted, very much so. He was a modest man who didn't seek celebrity, but I think any man who is successful in any field has a certain amount of celebrity. He can't help it.
- Fry: He was very different from Bufano, then?
- Field: Oh, very. There's no comparison between their characters. Ralph Stackpole was a lovable character.
- Fry: Was he well educated?
- Field: No, I don't think particularly so. I think he had just had an ordinary education and then maybe gone to art school.. I know he came from a pioneer Oregon family.
- Fry: You mentioned that he had done a bust of Sterling.
- Field: You go look at that, in the library.
- Fry: Did he know Noel Sullivan?
- Field: Oh, undoubtedly he did. I never saw him down at Noel's, but that doesn't mean that he didn't know him.
- Fry: What about Albert Bender?
- Field: Oh, yes, Albert Bender was one of his great supporters. I don't necessarily mean financially, but as one who would boost him in every possible way.

[end of interview]



1945

Photograph by Marjorie Swingston Goodale

SARA BARD FIELD



1965

Photograph by Carol Baldwin

XLI FRIENDS AT THE CATS

[July 3, 1963]

Carl Sandburg

Field:

When I was a young woman in suffrage work, on what I think was my first trip across the country, I was interviewed in Chicago by a young man, a reporter on one of the Chicago papers, who impressed me greatly because he was such an individual. He had a strange old-young look about him, and he had an idiom of his own that delighted me. There was none of the claptrap or ordinary questions, there were interesting and different ones expressed in a very original manner. I discovered that he had just published a book of poems that was attracting a good deal of attention. Nowadays everyone knows one of the poems that was in it, about the fog coming in "on little cat feet." When I found he was a poet, and I aspired to the same high eminence of profession, we found each other more than just interviewer and interviewee. We really began to feel that we had started a friendship. While, of course, so busy and a man [and one] who became so famous hadn't much time for correspondence in the years that followed, still we never lost track of each other, nor he of Erskine. He was utterly devoted to Erskine's work, and thought he was one of the very great men of our time. The inscription in his Life of Lincoln practically says that.

I didn't see him again for quite a long time, and then on a trip that both Erskine and I had to make East, we were again in Chicago. Harriet Monroe gave a luncheon for us, and Carl Sandburg was there. I remember the utter unconventionality with which he was dressed and in the way he acted. The minute he saw me he threw me up in the air and said, "Well, here's the old sailor's black-eyed wife." [Laughter] This I tell not because of his relation to me but to show how simple and original his approach to life and to people was.

- Field: The last time that I saw him, though of course we kept in touch with an occasional card (especially at Christmas) was at The Cats. He had come out to lecture and read his poems, and he came down to make a special visit to us. We had a memorable visit. At that time he inscribed his wonderful book to us [Life of Lincoln]. He felt that Erskine, just as I think he felt about himself, was a good deal like Lincoln, that there were qualities in both himself and Erskine akin, and this drew them close. But from then on we had very little personal touch. As I say, he was much in demand, speaking or reading his poetry, or staying at home doing his work, with which he would allow nothing to interfere.
- Fry: Did you notice his unconventionality when he came to visit you?
- Field: Yes, the same unconventionality. His clothes weren't pressed, and he wasn't manicured in any way, or in any way fixed up. There was a wholeness to him that couldn't be changed by age or conditions of scene or money. I suppose he's made a good deal of money on his books, but nothing made him any different than just Carl Sandburg. I love him for that memory, and though I haven't seen him in years I have no doubt that when he addressed Congress on Lincoln's birthday, he dressed in the same informal fashion. This quality in him was so real, it wasn't adopted at all, but a natural thing in him.
- Fry: Someone said once that he was making a profession out of being Carl Sandburg.
- Field: Well, I never felt that about him. I can see that a carping critic might, but I don't think so. I think that he was born Carl Sandburg and has remained Carl Sandburg. I think he's poetry has the same quality. The People, Yes, for example, I think is a broad and fine coverage of his love of the American people, rather like that of Whitman.
- Fry: Did you and Erskine discuss with him any of the politics of that day?
- Field: I'm sure we did, because of course we were interested in them. But after this long lapse of time, over a quarter of a century, I can't remember the exact subjects we discussed.
- Fry: Did you and he discuss poetry?
- Field: I remember telling him I wished I could be a poet like him. He said, "Don't wish it, and don't ever try to be anything but yourself." I have always remembered that, and felt that that was part of his sense of integrity that he carried with him,

Field: that nobody must try to be anything that they're not.

John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck came into our lives quite late in Erskine's period, and remained a rather brief time because he went East in a few years. He had been exceedingly poor.

Fry: You knew him when he was at Monterey?

Field: I knew of him. I was on a committee of awards for the best short story, and I felt that he was the only one who had written something that deserved an award, and was very disappointed when he didn't get it. John was a perfectly delightful person to have come into your home, or to go into his home. It was the first money [See below. -Ed.] that he got, because he had been very poor, and he was so delighted he was like a child, and his wife too--his first wife, Carol. I feel it was a great loss in his life when she went out of it. No one can judge for another, but that's my feeling about it. He made his first money not on a book that was later published (it was first refused), The Pastures of Heaven, which was written about the Salinas or Carmel Valley, but on Tortilla Flat.

Fry: I thought Cup of Gold came out earlier, in 1929, but Tortilla Flat was his first success, yes.

Field: I still can read it with joy. Those people are so true to their natures and bring back so much the atmosphere of that region in the old days, before it changed so greatly.

Some people told me they saw the Steinbecks one day at Monterey Bay. They themselves had had a very good lunch, and they couldn't bear to throw away the leftovers, and they saw this young couple sitting there and went over to them and said, "Would you excuse us, but would you like to share a little of our lunch? We brought more than we needed." And they took it like starving people. Then they confessed to these friends of ours that they had only money enough for a cup of coffee for their lunch. So you see what struggles they went through.

Of course, after Tortilla Flat he had no trouble publishing. The next book was Of Mice and Men, which was highly praised.

Fry: Did you know him when he was writing In Dubious Battle?

Field: We didn't know him then, but just after. That was another one he had written before he became famous.

But then came the time of the migratory workers. He still needed money, because these two books, while successful, hadn't made him a fortune. He'd bought a little piece of land and built a little house, in the hills near us, fortunately for us because we always enjoyed their friendship very much. [Noise of airplane] George West, who was then the editor of the San Francisco News, gave him the assignment of writing up the condition of the migratory workers, and anyone who has these newspapers today has something very rare. I'm sorry we didn't keep ours, but you can't keep everything. You can see what his wife, Carol, meant to him, because he dedicates the book Grapes of Wrath to a friend and to Carol, "Who made me do it." She saw at once, with a very keen eye, that in these articles there was an excellent story to be extracted, and she urged him to do it. By his own admission, he was a lazy writer. He didn't rush at writing out of love of it; he had to be really engrossed by the subject. Evidently it was she who showed him how to become engrossed in the story from his experiences in writing these newspaper articles.

Fry: Did they discuss it with you and Erskine?

Field: Oh, indeed they did. But that was also, in a way, the beginning of a great deal of sadness, because Hollywood grabbed him. They wanted to make a picture of it, and from the simple life that they had lived together John began going down, getting mixed up with all the Hollywood people. And at the last moment on his way back, he'd call Carol up and say he was bringing five Hollywood people to dinner. He made life pretty hard for her. She had no help. His associations for him were easy and for her they were pretty difficult. Maybe that was the beginning, or perhaps it was because they didn't have children, which I think they wanted very much indeed. But I think it's more likely that John had so many people in the Hollywood life that he just grew away from her.

Fry: They were divorced in 1942.

Field: That was very sad. Both Erskine and I felt extremely sorrowful about it.

Fry: Was Carol in agreement with the divorce proceedings?

Field: I presume she was, the way modern young people are. She may not have wanted it, but I think she didn't hamper him. He has never been really happily married since, as I understand it, unless he

Field: is now. I of course haven't heard from him in years. I have thought of writing him a little letter, because in his last book, Travels With Charley, he has a reference to Erskine and some of the Indian stories that Erskine told him, and it's all wrong. I've thought of writing him that in a second edition it ought to be corrected.

Fry: When you knew him, did he dislike crowds and the city, as Jeffers did?

Field: Yes, very much so. When we first knew him he had no desire for crowds at all, and he was an awfully nice person to have up evenings for dinner or any social occasion, because he was an easy talker and a good one. I can remember him sitting on the floor at our house with a bottle of our good red wine next to him, and before the evening was over the whole bottle was consumed. He was a good Scandinavian in that he could take plenty of stimulant without seeming to feel it very badly.

Just before he went East, shortly before Erskine died, he came over and brought us a still-unpublished book of his--it was not more than privately published, and the reason for that was it was not very complimentary to the Catholic church. I don't remember the name now.

Fry: Was he concerned with social and political movements?

Field: Well, certainly not much in his writing. Grapes of Wrath came as near being a social document--and this next-to-last book, The Winter of our Discontent, has a powerful moral value running through it.

Fry: Did he join you in any of your efforts--for example, such things as the Tom Mooney case? Did he get exercised about these things?

Field: Not to my memory, he didn't. I don't think he got involved at all.

Carol was deeply interested in Mexican things; she used to love to go down to Mexico after they had money enough to travel a little. She used to collect little crèches. I often thought that was a touching indication of her longing for a child.

Fry: How did they feel about the other arts?

Field: I don't know. They liked music, I remember that. He moved first

Field: farther away from us in the hills; then when they made some more money he built a better house closer. He had built right into the ceiling a loudspeaker so the music could come right down as if it were out of heaven. But all this was before he got mixed up with the Hollywood crowd. It seemed to change him greatly. I am surprised when I think of what a strong nature he had seemed to be. I wouldn't have thought that Hollywood could change a man so much.

Then soon after all this and Carol and he were divorced he moved East.

Fry: Did you keep in touch with Carol?

Field: She called me up once in a very mysterious manner, and said very excitedly that she was going to have a baby. I think it was just wishful thinking; she never did have one. This was before the divorce. She had been in Hawaii, and I think she may have had an affair, and felt she was going to have a child. But it was not so. And that's the very last I ever heard of Carol. I wish I knew where she was, because I really loved her. She was a very lovable girl then, and I think her heart was broken.

Fry: He was always in revolt against puritanism--

Field: That's what this book shows, the one he gave us. I thought it was very sweet of him to come over; it was just before he left, and he wanted to leave some souvenir. He said he'd had some very happy times at our house. He didn't say it quite so smoothly as that; he was a rough customer, but that's what he meant. He didn't have any use for the formalities. He had abrupt and simple ways.

Fry: He has always felt he is a learning writer. What do you think about his writings?

Field: Well, I think he never rose above Grapes of Wrath. I think his heart was in that. All the criticisms I have seen of him since then have been that he never did write again as well as that.

Fry: Some felt that he wrote with an eye toward the movie industry after that.

Field: I think very likely. He was encouraged to do that by his agents and publishers. But I can't answer for that. He went East and very soon Erskine was too ill for me to care about anything else. And then he [Colonel Wood] died, in 1944.

James Duval Phelan

Field: Phelan liked to think of himself as a writer, but he wasn't. He came from one of the old Irish families that settled early in San Francisco. His forebears had made money, and whether it was ambition or not, instead of just sitting back and living a luxurious life, he did want to serve the public. It's true he liked recognition, but it seemed to me always that it's much nobler even so to take office and serve the public as he did. He was mayor of San Francisco during some of its most tumultuous days, and from that he went on to be senator.

Fry: When did you meet him first?

Field: When he was a senator.

Fry: Was this when you were working on suffrage?

Field: Yes.

You see, we lived very close to him--I mean, as country folk go, not squeezed up next door. He was on the outskirts of Los Gatos. We were at their place for many a very fine occasion, because he used to ask whole groups of literary people, classes of students, and have lunches for them on his beautiful veranda. He liked to think of himself as a sort of Maecenas, someone who furthers the arts, a patron, and he certainly was in a way. And it seems to me, too, after he was no longer a senator, that he should not just live merely a social life, but that he should like to have these groups of creative people. Of course, he had his nephew Noel Sullivan down to sing often.

I remember many, many outstanding occasions there. For instance, I remember the day we were all at luncheon out on this veranda--I can't remember which particular group it was; he invited us often, and we used to go frequently--I remember his rising from the table and knocking on his glass for attention, because there was all the murmur of voices going on, and he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have just had a telegram handed to me. Charles Lindbergh landed on the Paris airfield today." And awe went over the whole group, because of the wonder of that sole flier accomplishing the crossing of the Atlantic. Now it seems a stale story, but it wasn't stale then. It was full of excitement and wonder.

Fry: Did Erskine support Phelan in his campaign for senator?

Field: He didn't have any chance to. He didn't come down [to] San Francisco

- Field: until after the senator wasn't running any more.
- Fry: I also wanted to ask you what his other, non-student parties were like.
- Field: Well, Erskine's sister was married to Admiral Wylie, at that time the chief admiral of the navy, and we used to be asked to the big naval parties when the fleet came in. Sometimes we would be asked to the musicales--what do they call them?--at which they would have some well-known performer, some far more professional than Phelan's nephew, Noel Sullivan. He really wanted to be considered a patron of culture, and I think that was far more important to him than shining in social groups.
- Fry: What artists did he sponsor?
- Field: Gertrude Atherton was one. There was a room set aside for her at "Montalvo," his place, even before she became a famous writer, and I think his encouragement meant a great deal to her. He sponsored me; he asked me to read from my poems, and I didn't think they were very good at that time. I didn't need financial sponsorship, if that's what you mean, though I haven't a doubt that he did sponsor some rising young creative people. But I have to say he wasn't very acute in his discrimination, as a rule. He was very proud of Noel. He [Noel Sullivan] had many parties for some of the stars of the opera at that period, which was very impressive to his uncle.
- Fry: Knowing Benjamin Lehman and his preference for German lieder, I wondered if this was also one of Phelan's favorites.
- Field: I don't know. I think he loved the lyric generally.
- Fry: Did he know Josephine Miles?
- Field: Oh no.
- Fry: What about his politics?
- Field: Well, like all Democrats he was fairly liberal. As mayor of San Francisco, he really took very direct part in that time, which was one of turmoil and strife.
- Fry: Did he ever mention any of his difficulties with other politicians of that era?
- Field: No. I wish I had asked him now. But usually, you know, we didn't meet person-to-person so much as in large groups. I think he ought to be very highly remembered, because with all

Field: his faults as all have, he really contributed a great deal to his community.

Fry: How did he feel about your starting a school of the arts?

Field: He had nothing to do with it.

I just know that in general he and Erskine were in agreement politically, though he didn't go as far as Erskine. They were quite congenial, and I don't think Erskine was ever congenial with someone who wasn't liberal. Not happy with them, I mean. The senator admired him greatly.

Fry: Some have mentioned that he was a very cool and proper man. Is this the way he impressed you?

Field: Oh yes, he was all of that. He played his proper part in the social game. He belonged to the wealthy set and he knew it, and I think he was rather pleased to be so. But he didn't confine his life to that, as so many do. He expanded it into real service also.

We had Ella Young, the Irish poet, staying with us, and gave an afternoon party for her at which we had her framed between two vases of great bunches of wildflowers--a kind that shut up into tiny buds at night and then at four o'clock open. It looked just like bare stems in these vases, and while she was reading all of a sudden they began to blossom. It seemed to me to represent the miracle of Ella Young herself, with her Irish magic and her belief in the little people. Phelan was there among others, and she read this beautiful poetry of hers, and I looked over and he was sound asleep. Perhaps he'd had a tiresome day and it was a little warm, but I just felt that he ought to have kept awake to hear this. I would say that this is indicative of a kind of lack of critical values on his part. He just couldn't stay awake, while others couldn't have closed their eyes.

[end of interview]

XLII THREE, NOT OF A KIND

[July 25, 1963]

Lincoln Steffens

- Fry: We haven't covered Steffens at The Cats, or Noel Sullivan. We have covered Steinbeck, and Fremont Older--
- Field: Yes. Of course, Fremont Older died early in our life there. (I'm glad this isn't going on the record) We were never as fond of his wife as of him. He was the colorful, strong, powerful personality. She was sort of ladies' club.
- Fry: Theirs wasn't like the Steffens' marriage, then, though there was also the age difference?
- Field: Nothing like it, except this: she was absolutely acquiescent to Older's wishes and to his taking in these paroled prisoners that were let out. You never knew whether you were having a murderer wait on you.
- Fry: I got the impression that she was pretty Victorian in her outlook. She looked askance at some of the more bohemian friends.
- Field: Yes. I think Older was the least self-conscious man. His drive consumed him so that he didn't have time to think about himself. Just to illustrate the difference between them, when Older sold out to the Hearst interests, they were invited down to Hearst's castle, and I think she was very set up by that. After his death she wrote a life of Hearst, and the high school at Los Gatos asked me one time if I would present the prizes for the best literary effort, and to my horror I found that one of them was her life of Hearst. It was about the last thing that I could have presented with any heart.
- Fry: In Heavenly Discourse, Erskine wrote about Satan and the publisher.

Fry: Was the publisher a composite including Hearst, or out-and-out Hearst?

Field: Oh, that was out-and-out Hearst, just covered enough by Erskine's legal knowledge to avoid prosecution. [Laughter]

Among the many visitors to The Cats--and there were a great many, though we tried to restrict them in a sense so we could get our work done--there was none dearer to us (though he couldn't come very often because he too was a busy writer) than Lincoln Steffens. He was living in Carmel part of that time that we lived at The Cats, especially during the latter part of his life. We found him just what his writings would show; he was all of a piece. He was witty, he was certain of his position, and he was (though I don't suppose he expressed it in those words, possibly for his son's sake) undoubtedly a Communist, a convinced Communist. He believed that the social system, our social system, was going to pieces. When the great Depression came, with Hoover, the sight of the breadlines, the enormous number of those jobless people, and the poverty, those whose stocks and bonds were swept away, I think was more than just a pitiful sight to him. It was something to make him think very deeply of how easily our economic system can be upset. I haven't a doubt, though he may never have couched it in so many words, that he was a convinced Communist--to the extent that he felt that there had to be complete government ownership of everything that appertained to what the earth can give--lumber, agriculture, ore, oil. His references to it [his political party] were always oblique.

Fry: In the late twenties and early thirties, just before his death, would you place him as a Lenin Communist?

Field: I think he had enormous respect for Lenin. I can't be sure how far his thinking on this went. I wish I had actually talked to him more about this. Naturally we did talk about the economic system, because that was the uppermost subject in our minds, but somehow I don't feel that I dug deep enough to get at the very root of what his feeling was as to the change that had to come. I can't believe that he believed that all liberalism had to be given up for it. You must remember that in the earlier days when Lenin was alive a great many people, like himself and like ourselves, felt that the millenium had come. This was the great change in the system that had been needed. It was only, as far as we were concerned, when the great purges came--and I don't know how Steffens would have translated this--and we saw that the law was just brushed aside, that the great institution of rule by law that had been built up over the centuries and had been a bulwark to man's personal safety and liberty was being brushed

Field: aside--it was not till then that my husband became really very much opposed to the way the system was being carried out in Russia.

Fry: Did Erskine's attitudes differ from Steffens on this?

Field: Well, a great deal of the time that we were at The Cats Steffens wasn't there. He would be East; for quite a while he lived in Italy, and we never had a chance to discuss it through. He came to see us more often when he came to live in Carmel, but there would be others there and there would never seem to be a chance for the kind of intimacy that is needed to get at a person's deepest thoughts on important questions. I think Steffens hoped to support Kerensky at first, rather than Lenin, but when the Kerensky government went to pieces, he had a respect for Lenin that led him, I think, farther than Erskine or I would have gone in our views on what kind of change was necessary. We were as much aware that a change was necessary as anybody else. We too lost heavily on the stock market. It cut down on our income very greatly. Still I don't think personal reasons would have influenced us as much as the impersonal results of so much tragedy that we saw all around us.

Fry: There's a letter from Steffens on page 1013 of his collected letters, in which he writes to Erskine. It seems a rather ambivalent letter. He says, "You two conservatives have closed your eyes and just stuck. Sometimes I think you have opened your eyes and stuck. Anyhow, you have stuck--liberty and love. Poetry is a terrible business especially in a period of transition."

Is he being facetious?

Field: No, I don't think he is. He had an oblique way of coming at his ideas, and there was some oblique meaning in that that I don't quite understand yet. He was wrong in calling us conservatives, because we weren't, obviously. I think that Erskine must have answered that letter.

Fry: Steffens says, "You two are incorrigible--the last old believers in love and justice left in the whirling world."

Field: [Laughs] Well, Erskine must have answered that letter. I wish the answers to some of these letters, if they were kept, could be published. The intercommunication would have been very important. We used to tease him and tell him that we went farther than he did--that we were anarchists.

Field: The letter brought tears to my eyes, in which he described how he felt at The Cats--touching [page 828 of Steffens' collected letters]. In spite of whatever disapproval he had of what he called our conservative views (but which were extremely unconservative), in spite of that, he seemed to get a peculiar joy and a kind of effluvia that flowed from The Cats into his being, which I think didn't happen to everyone. He felt, I think, that it was a kind of life he wanted, to begin with.

Ella [Winter], whom he loved passionately, loved him--loves him still, I'm told--but she was admittedly promiscuous, and believed in that. I think that at times, especially toward the last part of his life when he had to be in bed a great deal because of his heart (he had a very bad heart)--I think then he used to often be lonely. I used to go to Carmel and sit by his bed, not allowing him to talk too long, but reading to him, or just now and then having a little light conversation and giving him his medicine. And I had a feeling of a loneliness in him. I think he felt that at The Cats he really had attained the kind of love that perhaps everyone longs for. It came as near perfection as his life allowed. Nothing of course is perfect on this globe. You must remember that how one feels about a person or a place is in the feeler himself. Steffens was an extraordinarily sensitive man, though many people who knew him might not have thought so.

I think towards the latter part of his years in Los Gatos [Carmel?] his struggle--though it wasn't that, Jeffers was too mild a man--but the great difference between Robinson Jeffers and himself came into evidence and brought out his views probably more than anything else. In the last part of his life, his writings in the little weekly paper, the Pacific Weekly (for which I too wrote at times) made him speak more positively than he often would in conversation. He loved to quibble; he loved (let us say) the treatment of ideas as something never to be asserted at first, certainly, with positiveness, but just as a proposition, a postulate. He was a strangely quiet man for all his writings and letters; in conversation he wasn't a glib person at all.

Fry: In his accounts of confrontations with political leaders or others, one comes to admire his ability to put across his own propositions and ideas in the other fellow's terms.

Field: Oh yes, that he could do. That was, I think, his greatest asset--the ability to think as others thought, to put himself in the place of another.

Fry: Did you talk to him about some of his favorite issues, like migratory labor, or the Mooney case?

Field: We talked a great deal about Mooney. There were two other men that were in jail in the MacNamara trial. I noticed in a letter I was reading over this morning where he refers to the fact that he must go to San Francisco to see what he can do with Rolph, who was mayor, and with Fleishhacker, who was the big money dictator, to see what he could do about the two prisoners, J.B. McNamara and Max Schmidt.

Fry: Do you know how he operated when he got here to do that?

Field: No, I don't. I wish I had followed that up.

But you mustn't forget that we were very busy people too. If we had been preparing to write something about Lincoln Steffens that would have been a different matter. We were very busy then, and we got all too little time to ourselves. We were constantly interrupted and we didn't follow--we know they [the prisoners] didn't come out at that time.

Fry: Do you remember his or Ella's comments about migratory labor at that time?

Field: Well, I remember the whole group of us--Mary and George West, Steffens, and ourselves--were all in agreement at the outrage of the neglect of migratory workers, and I think that John Steinback's articles, which came out at the time, had a great deal to do with improving some of the conditions. They're not nearly enough improved yet, but the [articles] helped improve some of the conditions.

Fry: Did you know Ella Winter very well?

Field: Yes. We were in Florence together, when she was carrying her baby. I think that brings two women together, rather closely. She writes to me even now as "My dearest friend." Her book will be out in October and there will be a good deal about all this from which you can get a lot of information. We were the only ones that were at their marriage ceremony in Paris, [before a] justice of the peace.

Fry: I just wanted to ascertain that this closeness continued through the Carmel years.

Field: Oh yes, and even though I haven't been able to write her very much in latter years, because of circumstances, we never feel that we've lost any of that old closeness. I just had a letter from her the other day--she is so delighted that Pete, her son, is near us now. I have seen the little granddaughter that Steffens would have loved so much, because he always wanted a little girl. He is

Field: the only man I know who would have been happy if their one and only child had been a girl. I don't mean that he was unhappy with Pete. He had a wonderful relationship with Pete, and yet there was something about the idea of bringing up a girl according to his own peculiar notions, whatever they were, that intrigued him greatly. In this letter I had from Ella the other day, she said how happy she was that a little girl had been born [to Pete and his wife], and she couldn't help but realize how joyous it would have made Steffie, as we all loved to call him.

Fry: She's married to Donald Ogden Stewart now, isn't she?

Field: Yes, she is, and happily. But you know, life is a complex thing. She is married to him and undoubtedly she has a good life with him, but her deep and great love is still for Steffie. Her son told me that himself.

Fry: Was Donald Ogden Stewart a part of this crowd at Carmel?

Field: No. He was down in Hollywood. She didn't meet him until quite a while after Steffens' death. She didn't know him during his lifetime. (I intend to give these two letters to the library. I think they will be interesting to go with her book).

An interesting sidelight on Steffens is in a letter to me that he wrote at the time that I knew he was writing his autobiography. I wrote him and said, "Dear Steffie, with all the causes that you've been connected with, and the great things that you have done and the young men that you've taught to be better journalists by thinking of themselves into other people, don't forget to include your relationship with women. You're inclined to do that."

And he wrote me back and said, "Dear Sara, I cannot write about my relationships with women, because I don't understand them."

Fry: He was willing to write about other enigmas, though.

Field: Well, this was an enigma roo great for him to solve.

Fry: There was a little controversy I read about in the Noel Sullivan letters between him and Steffens. What was that?

Field: Well, it was a sort of mixture of relationships there. It was between Steffens, and Ella maybe, and Noel Sullivan. Noel felt that they'd gone too far in their economic views, and he, being a Catholic, I think was very agitated at the attitude the church

Field: was taking toward his friendship. I wish we had that here.

Fry: Did this affect Noel's relationship with Steffens, so that he hesitated to see him socially?

Field: Well, for a while it did. I felt that Noel had the wrong idea of him, and I think this letter was written about that.

Fry: The more I think about it, the one I'm talking about is your letter after the Russian consul was taken because of something you had written, which must have appeared in the Pacific Monthly.

Field: Yes, it did. And that haunts me to this day. [Looks for letter]

Fry: If you can remember the name of the Russian consul perhaps you could tell the story--we don't have it on tape. As I remember your letter to Noel Sullivan said that Steffie (or Ella) had written you saying that they wondered at the time if you should have written what you did, but then they went ahead and printed it, and you felt that if they had reservations about it they shouldn't have printed it.

Field: Naturally, among people of decisive views and warm temperaments, there were often differences between all of us, but they never were so serious as to break a friendship.

Fry: I was also thinking of Steffens' letter [February 12, 1936] on your article in the Pacific Monthly about the Russian consul, Galcovich.

Field: This was written to Noel, of course, and it says, "I could see you felt badly physically and mentally the night you were here. I agree with you that the Christian church...[etc.]" [Reading continues for several minutes]

They had another controversy in which Noel said some rather sharp and unkind things about Ella. I wrote him explaining what Ella meant and why she said what she did say, regarding radicalism generally.

Fry: Not morality?

Field: No. I had the strong belief that political and economic beliefs shouldn't be separated from the teachings of Jesus; that unless they conformed with what he taught of sharing and love, they weren't really in harmony with the movement of the human soul. That was what I was trying to get Noel to see, and he had practically called people I loved very dearly, and knew weren't Communists but only speaking for a juster society (like Alec [Alexander] Meiklejohn, for instance)--he had called them Communists. I

- Field: thought in the letter in here that I had replied to that. Speaking of Meiklejohn my eye fell on a letter from Steffens in which he mentions opposition of some young people to Meiklejohn.
- Fry: Do you know how Steffens felt about Meiklejohn?
- Field: I think he [apparently referring to Noel Sullivan] didn't feel very warmly toward him. Noel was convinced that Meiklejohn was a Communist.
- Fry: What about Steffens? Was he warm toward Meiklejohn?
- Field: I don't think they had very much contact. I can ask Alec about that when he returns from Santa Barbara.

Noel Sullivan

There may be other thoughts that I will have about Steffens later because he was such a peculiarly close friend in our lives. But we had others too. So perhaps I should talk about Noel himself. We are talking about the letters to him and referring to him. I haven't yet told about his life. I have told about my meeting with him. I don't think I've tried to describe his character, and I don't know that I have the power to do it, but I would say that he was one of the most tender and loving people I have ever met in all my life. His compassion was boundless. I think that the list of the causes that he was interested in was headed by his long fight against capital punishment. He had made himself see an execution, so that he could talk from actual experience, and after that he became almost passionate on the subject of capital punishment. He and I worked together on this; there were meetings at which we both spoke on the same platform. I remember speaking soon after the publication of Pale Woman, which had made some little quiet stir, and Noel introducing me as the author of that book, and saying very kind things about it.

[Interruption]

Noel had one of the most difficult lives that I think anybody with his temperament could have. In the first place, he was shy as a child and sensitive to a degree, and he clung to his mother's skirts, and there is no doubt that it was a very strong mother complex that developed in his childhood between him and his mother. He was remembered by some neighbors as going with his mother at Christmastime (when lady bountifuls were plentiful) carrying Christmas baskets to the very poor. He was always rather

Field: ashamed of that, and at the same time, as I said to him once, delighting in his bright toys, happy in the fact that he didn't have to go out in the world of business and earn his living.

He became immersed in the Catholic Church. All his people were strong Catholics, and they naturally led him in that direction. His mother even had a private chapel in her house. But when the first world war came, he went over to France and drove an ambulance. [Noise] Over there on runs, he began to meet the agnostics and skeptics and the people who differed greatly from those he had been brought up with. There wasn't the deep immersion in Catholicism such as he had over here. So over there he began to grow very much more liberal. In fact, in some ways, one could say that he had a temporary revolution from the church. One of the things they are forbidden to do is to go to other churches, other denominations, but when he came back he insisted on visiting other churches, seeing what they were like and what they had to say.

In fact, when we first knew him, in his house there was an atmosphere of release and freedom that I could have wished could have lasted.

But later in life, as Noel grew older, Catholicism had been buried too deep in him not to reappear. He had a sister whom he adored who was a mother superior of the Carmelite nunnery in Santa Clara. He used to go visit her regularly, and I think she kept track of all his doings, by some subterranean passage. He began to grow back more and more into the, well, what seems to me is a rather fanatical Catholicism. He tried very hard to get me to join the Catholic Church. I remember one time when I was visiting him we went to a concert together; I was staying in the guest cottage that was a little distance from the house, but it was lighted all the way by a string of electric lights. So when Noel started to walk home with me, I said, "Noel, this is unnecessary, because you're tired; you've had guests and done all this, and I can see my way perfectly down here."

He said, "I want to come." So he came, and at the door, instead of saying good night, he said, "Do you mind if I come in for a little while?"

I said, "Why, of course not, Noel, if you feel up to it."

Well, with many, many stammerings (which was part of his speech), and difficulties in utterance, he said to me, "I don't see why, if you're going to be a mystic, you don't join the Catholic Church, it's the greatest home of mysticism."

Field: And I said, "Oh, Noel, you have to believe in the dogmas of the church, and I just can't believe in those. I couldn't falsify myself enough to come into the church, disbelieving as I do the major doctrines."

He said, "You know that they make great allowances for people of your intellect, you don't have to swear to all those documents, if you'll just believe in one thing, and that is that Jesus Christ was the only savior of the world."

I said, "But Noel, I don't. I think it has had other saviors--look at Buddha, his compassion and his self-sacrificial life. Lao Tse. I think that all these have helped the world onward toward what you'd call salvation."

He said, "Well, I'm very sorry that you feel this way, because I think you belong in the Church." With that he bade me an affectionate goodnight and left.

I often think that this marked the period of his need to proselyte. He went about making Catholics of his friends as fast as he could, and it was at such a time as this that the controversy, whatever it was, came up between Ella (I think it was more Ella than it was Steffie) and Jeffers, people of that type. But it was an inevitable reversion. Nobody who is of his temperament, and he almost approached being masochistic because I think suffering attracted him. I don't mean that he liked to suffer, but unconsciously he was more at home in a suffering world than in a world of enjoyment. Although there were very happy occasions at his house and [he] entered into them with vigor.

Fry: Were there any notable converts to Catholicism among his friends?

Field: Not any particularly notable ones. I think the most touching one was the conversion of a Negro housekeeper he'd had for years. Her name was Eulah. It wasn't hard for her, adoring him as she did, to accept whatever he told her.

Further Comment on James Phelan

Fry: Was a lot of it from the influence of Phelan?

Field: Oh, no, Phelan almost, you might say, resented the Church. He left word that his estate would surely [be] in the hands of the Art Commission, because he was so afraid that the Catholics would get it. Gertrude Atherton told me herself that one day

- Field: walking on the hills of his beautiful estate with her--she was often a resident there; he always had a room for her--he said to her, "Some day it's my great fear that this will all fall into the hands of the Catholic Church." I don't know whether he left word that he was not to have church rites at the time of his death, but, whether he did or not, when he became unconscious they gave him extreme unction, and he had all the regular funeral--
- Fry: Did you know Phelan about the time of the controversy over exclusion of the Japanese?
- Field: Yes; he was very angry at me because I spoke before the foreign affairs committee (I was in Washington at the time) begging that [restriction on Japanese immigration] be removed and the Japanese be allowed to come in. When I came back to California the Japanese were very grateful to me for it. I knew some Japanese in San Francisco.
- Fry: You were before the Congress?
- Field: Yes. I was unfortunately fairly prominent at that time because of my work in the suffrage movement, and I was from the western region, where the Japanese particularly wanted to come. So all together they invited me to testify.
- Fry: This was after Phelan became senator?
- Field: No, he wasn't senator. When I came back he reproached me very much for doing this. He said we just couldn't let them in; they would just overrun the country. As a matter of fact, they're the most careful people about birth control of any.
- Fry: Did you and Phelan continue this discussion for a few years? It did go on for awhile?
- Field: Yes, he was opposed to the end.
- Fry: How did this fit in with the rest of his beliefs? Did this surprise you?
- Field: It disappointed me. I can't say it surprised me. You never know with politicians, or former politicians. He wasn't a politician any more; he was just living quietly at "Montalvo" part of the time and San Francisco part of the time, but he retained his old political instincts. It never surprises me which way a politician turns.
- Fry: Did you and he agree on other things--like the McNamara case?

Field: Oh no, not at all! As I remember we didn't have much discussion on that question, ever. He just knew where we stood, and he didn't bring the subject up.

Fry: What about Mooney?

Field: We didn't talk about that. I think he would have agreed with Fleishhacker on that [the] way that I told you about in that story where he said, "If he isn't guilty he's just where he ought to be anyway ." Mooney had one of the worst deals, as regards our boasted justice, of any of those people. It was proved absolutely that he did not have anything to do with that bomb, whereas McNamara did have. Though they didn't intend to kill anybody or do more than have a minor explosion in the back alley just to frighten the owner of the Los Angeles paper into giving better conditions to their men.

Fry: I've never gone into the Mooney case with you. You gave quite a lot of this to Frost for his thesis.*

Field: I didn't give a lot. I just gave all I can remember. I'll try to think back [over] all my relations to the Mooney case, which extended practically through the whole time that man was in prison--including Erskine's and my visits to him in San Quentin.

[end of interview]

*Richard Hindman Frost, "The Mooney Case in California Politics," M.A. Thesis, UCB, 1954.

XLIII WILLIAM ROSE BENET

[October 31, 1963]

- Fry: This says that William Rose Benet does not believe in writers becoming propagandists for any political system. He says, "Present-day radicals take themselves too seriously." He was at Mills in 1936, and he said he didn't like it, he didn't like the steady drain of teaching.
- Field: He wasn't a very good teacher. He was a good poet, but that doesn't mean you're a good teacher.
- Fry: Did he socialize with you much when he was at Mills? Is that when you saw him? But you knew him before that?
- Field: He would come out quite often to visit his children, who lived with Kathleen [Thompson] Norris. Teresa Thompson died, of that early flu [in 1919]. [Noise on tape] Bill loved to visit at The Cats. He was a delightful visitor, responsive and full of ideas always. Sometimes when I was discouraged as a poet, it was he who kept me encouraged. He would write, "You are a poet, and never lose faith in that. Your poetic output has proved it." Of course, one never can be grateful enough for that kind of encouragement.

He was a very sensitive, gentle person, and he must have been a very forgiving person, because Elinor Wylie was a woman who attracted other men, and in England had a very deep attraction to an Englishman to whom those famous sonnets in her last book are addressed. But always she came back to Bill. He was the one on whom she leaned, and with whom she was living when she died. He told me that her death [in 1928] was the most sudden and unexpected death he'd ever heard of. She asked him to get her a glass of water, and he went out to get it and when he came back she had risen in an attempt to get to her bed, or some such thing (she had been sitting down), and she fell over dead. This was a terrible shock to him. In his

Field: letters he tells of his high admiration of her; he placed her at the very pinnacle of the poets of her time. I think that he was the only one she would let see her in her last days, the last weeks of her life, because she had had a stroke and it had twisted her face. She was very beautiful, a very beautiful woman, and this of course had marred her beauty badly, and she took it deeply and wouldn't see anybody except Bill. He took tender and extreme care of her in those last weeks. One always loved very much Bill's unselfish and forbearing character, especially as you know how he had suffered.

His marriage to Lora Baxter didn't last long; it was a very quick affair. I think that a friend of mine was perfectly right, who wrote me, "Bill Benet just has to have a hearth," and since his hearth was cold he was susceptible to perhaps the first one that appealed to him at all. Lora was always away on tour.

Fry: Apparently their divorce was amicable.

Field: Absolutely. They couldn't have been divorced any other way, with Bill's character. He saw that it had been a too-quick marriage and he also felt a little guilty that he might have taken advantage of her youth, since he was [considerably] older. His fourth marriage I never knew very much about--[to] Marjorie Flack. She was out here once with him. She was much more near his age. I think it was really a marriage in which she made the approaches, because I think Bill felt he was through with marriage.

Fry: Did she seem to be the dominant partner in the marriage?

Field: Yes, I would say so. I think anyone could dominate Bill.

Fry: Did any of his other wives tend to dominate him?

Field: No, I don't think they did, but I think his real great love was Teresa Thompson, although he vastly admired Elinor Wylie. Some of his great poetry was written while he was married to Teresa.

Fry: She was the only one of his wives who didn't produce in the world of the arts.

Field: No. She produced his children, and she was absolutely the only one who I think was sufficiently happy making a home for him. She believed in him and his artistic ability.

Fry: Do you remember any special problems, or special aspirations, that he had as editor of Saturday Review?

- Field: No, I can't say I do. I think he was very exacting about poems he included, and that would show that he wanted to keep it on a first-rate level. But he wasn't as interested as the present editor of that poetry column in the new verse, the very new verse--what I call the puzzle poetry.
- Fry: He wrote you that he had taken the manuscript of Barabbas to a publisher?
- Field: No, he took Darkling Plain. Barabbas was already published, and he admired that poem very much.
- Fry: I think we should mention that the same year Barabbas came out, Benet's Riptide came out [1932] and you were both up for Pulitzer Prizes and he got it. Was he acting as a sort of agent for Darkling Plain?
- Field: Well, I put the book in his hands and said, "If you know of any publisher you think would care for this book, I wish you'd take it on a commission." I ought to say that Bill was always poor. He never strove to make money, and he really had a hard time often. I don't know whether he took it to more than one publisher, but Random House accepted it.
- Fry: You and he must have discussed poetry together; did you have more or less the same ideas about it?
- Field: Yes, I think we both had the same idea of poetry. I too was a great admirer of Elinor Wylie, and when I was in New York with Erskine, Inez Haynes Irwin, who was a quite prominent writer of rather feeble but good-selling novels, and [inaudible], the famous war correspondent, had us to lunch and invited Elinor Wylie. When she found that I too loved Shelley so greatly, she took my copy of Orphan Angel, which had just come out and I had just purchased it, and inscribed it.
- Fry: Did you keep up with Benet all the way through?
- Field: All the way through. We never lost contact with one another. We didn't see each other very frequently, because we were both very busy people.
- Fry: What sort of camaraderie did he and Erskine have?
- Field: [Laughs] Just read The Dust Which Is God,* and you'll see what

* New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1941, pp. 406-411. See also Benet's introduction to Collected Poems of Erskine Scott Wood (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1949).

Field: he thought of Erskine. There's a fascinating description of him in there. He admired and loved him deeply.

Fry: What did Erskine think of Benet?

Field: He was very fond of him, always glad when he came to see us.

Fry: My impression is that Benet was not so much of a crusader as Erskine was.

Field: No. I don't think he was born to be a crusader, except through his individual contacts, which aren't in the crusading class. But he always spoke his mind out, and he was a very liberal thinker.

I'm afraid I'll have to stop.

[end of interview]

XLIV THE MOONEY CASE

[August 8, 1963]

- Fry: Mooney first went to trial in January 1917, and was sentenced to be hanged in February.
- Field: There was the effort for armament then, and a great many citizens were against our getting into the war at all. When was my speech--?
- Fry: Your speech was in September 1916; right after the bomb, I guess.
- Field: It was certainly after the bomb was thrown. No, I think I spoke in the fall of--we can look that up.
- Fry: Did you speak after Mooney's sentencing in February?
- Field: I spoke later, when my husband and other competent lawyers had read the briefs and thought how unjust they were. I then made a speech. The first speech was not about Mooney; it had to do with disarmament.
- Fry: This was the speech you made at a labor union hall?
- Field: Yes, and met Noel Sullivan for the first time. I don't think it was at a union hall; it was a great big civic rink, which has been torn down since. It was packed. There was so much opposition to our getting into the war. Had the war ended when the bomb was thrown? I'm very--
- Fry: No--we hadn't gotten into it yet. He was sentenced in February 1917, and then a year and a half later, in November 1918, Governor Stephens commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.

I think the case lay dormant for a while, until about 1927 or '28, and then the cause was revived, before Governor Young took office.

Field: We kept it alive all the time.

I made my speech in 1916, before Mooney went on trial, but it was wholly pacifist. I found the notes to that speech, but I think I destroyed them. It was a good speech.

According to Frost,* I delivered a speech about Billings' trial—that was another speech entirely. "Emma Goldman had to leave, but as a prominent suffragist you were brought in," [he says]. Well, Emma Goldman didn't get there at all. She was speaking somewhere else and there was some hitch about her getting to the meeting on time. So they asked me if I would speak in her place, and I spoke not as a member of the [International Workers Defense League].

[Referring to her difficulty in recall] Someone said to me, "You've packed your life so full, it's like a trunk now in which you can't find things, it's so jammed."

Billings was convicted, and we later worked to get him out, too.

This speech that Frost refers to, was quite a different one, with Spreckels, the famous sugar man, presiding, and Fremont Older there.

Some people thought a German had thrown the bomb—that comes back to me very clearly now—just for sheer spite, and there was quite a feeling for us to go out against the Germans.

The throwing of the bomb in 1916 sent people into a panic. It was felt in some way that it was a challenge for us to take part in the war against the Germans. A great mass meeting was arranged by the opponents of this idea, at which Spreckels, the sugar magnate, presided, and Fremont Older aided and abetted. I was asked to represent the women of America at that meeting, only because I was a prominent suffragist. I remember feeling that in my passion for peace, I had really put something over for the first time in the way of making the audience feel how easily trapped into war they could be, and how the time had arrived for us to resist war with all our being. Little did I dream that there would be not only that war but another world war, and the threat of this nuclear destruction that hangs over us now. All that was in the future. In the meantime,

* Richard Hindman Frost, "The Mooney Case in California Politics," M.A. Thesis, UCB, 1954.

- Field: the big industrialists were out to get Mooney, and, for reasons that of course must have been very clearly stated in the trial, they found that they could make a case.
- Fry: You mean with the help of this Oxman testimony?
- Field: Yes. I'm glad you reminded me of that. Oxman was brought in from Oregon as having been a visitor in town, and having seen Mooney plant the suitcase with the bomb in it. Of course, all this was later dispelled.
- Fry: Do you remember working for Mooney before you went to The Cats, Sara? Maybe after Stephens had commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.
- Field: Yes, indeed. My husband was very active in this case. He read the briefs all through, knew them almost by heart, and he felt that if ever a man had had injustice shown him it was Mooney.
- Fry: Did Erskine do this on his own, or with a group of lawyers?
- Field: Oh, there was a group of lawyers, but those details have escaped me. But we lived and thought and talked Mooney constantly. The trial was absolutely convincing, to men of justice, that Mooney was innocent. There was an amazing photograph of him and his wife at the very time that they said the bomb had gone off, showing him on the roof of one of the buildings, watching the parade. You see, there had been a strong movement for us to get into the war against Germany, and the parade going on was for preparedness. It was at that time that I made a speech against it at the old rink.
- Fry: So your speech was close to the time of the parade?
- Field: Within a few days. There were citizens who felt the wickedness of our getting into war and decided that something must be done to offset the show of strength and consensus of the preparedness parade.
- Fry: So when Governor Stephens commuted Mooney's sentence a year and a half later, the long hard fight was just beginning then on the part of you and other liberals.
- Field: Oh, yes.
- Fry: Can you remember other people?
- Field: I can remember a lawyer, who is dead now, a very fine man named

Field: Austin Lewis. Of course, Fremont Older worked unceasingly; the Mooney case was his baby and as long as he had the Bulletin under his full control all the facts were revealed with great clarity. I can't remember whether he was allowed as much freedom of speech when he sold the Bulletin to Hearst and it became the Call-Bulletin, but he was still editor, and whenever he could he raised his voice against the wrong that had been done Mooney. He believed thoroughly in his innocence. The tragedy is that when Mooney was finally freed, after those long years, he was a sick man and he didn't live very long.

Fry: What did Austin Lewis do?

Field: I couldn't tell you much specific matter about him. He was a labor lawyer, always speaking on behalf of labor, and he was English born and had a fine reputation in San Francisco as one of the most honest lawyers there was there. I think he was mostly employed by labor.

Fry: Do you remember Mary Gallagher? Beginning about 1927, she took directions from Mooney.

Field: I remember her very well, as you say her name, but the facts concerning her that I have in mind are very sparse.

Fry: We have an interview with her from years ago, in which she tells of her work heading up a new committee for Mooney. Apparently Mooney had become unhappy with whoever was running his campaign--or his wife had.

Field: I have to say about Mooney, that while had he been the devil himself it would have been right to do the strenuous work that was done to see that justice was obtained for him--nevertheless, he was one of the most difficult men to work with that I think I ever knew. He was inclined to feel that he had to control everything, and his disposition was hard to adjust to. If Mooney was out of sorts with the committee--and it may have been that the committee wasn't doing just the work that he thought they ought to--nevertheless, one would have to know something more about Mooney himself before you believe that the committee was too erroneous.

Fry: Mary Gallagher stayed with it for about three years, and then she resigned because of a very strong difference of opinion of how the campaign should be run. He apparently would not tolerate any suggestions.

Field: No. To the very end he wanted to be the boss of everything. I think my husband was the only person who told him face to face,

Field: that unless he let some of the others who saw the thing with more impartiality than he did [take a greater part], my husband could not work any more in his behalf.

Fry: What was the issue at stake there?

Field: I don't remember.

Fry: I think there's a little anecdote about the time Erskine went to visit Fleishhacker on behalf of Mooney.

Field: Yes. He went in to see Herbert Fleishhacker, now dead. I should say before I proceed that Erskine had been attorney for many of their affairs up in Oregon. He had gotten to know both the brothers, Mortimer and Herbert, very well. Herbert was very influential in the city, financially and otherwise, so Erskine went in to talk to him. He said, "Now, Herbert, I want you to do something about righting this Mooney matter."

Herbert said to him, "What do you want me to do?"

He said, "I want you to see that this man is released from jail."

And Herbert said, "Well, [even] if he didn't do it, he's just where he ought to be anyway."

And Erskine was so angry. He said, "Look here, Herbert, this country doesn't work on that kind of principle. Justice is justice, and the day may come when you and the members of your race will want to call upon that justice."

Fry: Because Fleishhacker was a Jew?

Field: Yes.

Fry: Did Erskine think that Fleishhacker had the power really to bring about Mooney's release?

Field: Oh, yes, he had great power with all the state officials--he had power everywhere, as money always does, and he had been particularly aggressive in all kinds of civic matters.

Fremont Older could never get over the fact that there was a Mooney meeting in San Jose, a set-Mooney-free meeting, and Erskine was scheduled to speak. It was a pouring night, and he went out in all this downpour to make this speech, and the next day in the Call-Bulletin there was a very touching tribute to Erskine's loyalty and willingness to do what he could, no matter what the

Field: situation was.

Fry: I wanted to ask you one more thing. In her interview, Mary Gallagher seemed to think that there was a period in which there was little or no effort on behalf of Mooney--between 1920 and 1927, approximately. Is this your impression too?

Field: Well, I presume there was a period. People got awfully tired of hearing about the Mooney case, and it was only those desperate believers in justice who kept it alive at all. I haven't a doubt that there were periods when there seemed to be a dearth of any news about it.

Fry: Did this go on, in your own experience?

Field: Yes, it went on. The faithful few kept it alive.

Fry: What would you say that your main role was in this, Sara?

Field: Well, I'm glad to say that both my husband and I made frequent speeches, and we were always talking personally to people about it. We gave as liberally as we could to push further defense of him. And that seems to me to be all that I could do in the matter.

Fry: Do you remember Robert Minor in connection with this?

Field: Yes. He was a cartoonist, and he had been on the Masses. I think he was out here, or he came out here, to make some speeches for Mooney and to do what he could. He was a violent Communist, though, and he wasn't exactly the person to allow to have much hand in the matter.

Fry: Was he given too much "hand in the matter"?

Field: No. He was held back.

Fry: Mary Gallagher said she felt it was unfortunate that Mooney fell into the hands of the Communists when he got out of prison, that this prevented him from working for Billings as much as he might have.

Field: Well, I don't know that he fell into their hands. I think he was really at heart himself a Communist. I can't be sure of that, but that's my strong feeling, from the kind of people he had associated with before all this happened.

[end of interview]

XLV THE MANY SIDES OF COLONEL WOOD

[June 27, 1963]

Art and The Cats

Fry: Erskine lived a very long life, and someone remarked once that he had at least three full careers. Sara, at what point in his life would you like to begin a discussion of him?

Field: Well, I think it unnecessary to go into the details of his early life because I did not share that, and there are many articles to record them. But I would like to speak of the years at The Cats, at which time he took up his writing in a very particular manner. He was always writing, even when he was a young aide-de-camp of General Howard--he used to write on horseback sometimes, and there are notebooks of that in Huntington Library. But The Cats represents a specially productive part of his career, and he himself spoke of them as the happiest years of his life. He was not a young man when we planned the building there, but he plunged into the enterprise with the vigor of youth, as if he had endless time. He always lived as if he had endless time, but he knew he didn't, that no one does, and his poetry shows this. But so far as his outer living went he showed no sign of this. There was no such thing as morbidity in him. He was not of a hilarious nature, but he was cheerful and it took a great deal to get him down, as they say.

It is typical of him that he chose Walter Steilberg as our architect because Walter Steilberg had been one of Maybeck's students and had a great feeling for beauty, and when I say typical of him I mean that not only because he had a great feeling for beauty, but because he never thought to look into the detail of Steilberg's work and see whether the practical needs would be met. While Walter Steilberg was an engineer as well as a builder, he was careless

Field:

about watching things of a most important nature--like the roof; we had a perfectly flat roof on which we could walk and have sunbaths, but to have that an absolutely waterproof roof was a necessity, and Walter Steilberg did not see to that. We had great trouble with leakage. But that he built a beautiful place there was no doubt. He had a very fine sense of proportion. Even to enter our living room, without a stick of furniture in it, gave one a feeling of rest and peace because the proportions were so right. But the money we had to spend to repair that roof, and we never did get it into good shape again, was quite sad.

I should add that always beauty was above all with Erskine; he just could not live in an atmosphere that wasn't beautiful. He was an artist in every sense of the word, so he brought in his artist friends to cooperate in the building of the house, with the result that we had this beautiful painting done by Ray Boynton, who did the Mills College mural, and later we had it changed to a mosaic because the painting wouldn't hold. The dripping from the rain at night sent the concrete film over it and it just didn't last, so he came down and took the painting off and made a mosaic of the same design. When I asked him whether he had any special subject in mind, he said, well, there were some lines of Yeats that kept running through his mind when he was doing it: "My love went up into the mountain top and hid his face among a crowd of stars." ["When You Are Old," "...how love fled/And paced upon the mountains overhead/And hid his face amid a crowd of stars."]

Well, Erskine also brought in Ralph Stackpole, who not only did a fine piece of sculpture (a medallion which we had over the fireplace, which was supposed to represent peace; it was a woman holding a child), but he also did an enormous statue on the outside of our house. It had to be hoisted up on great derricks, it weighed so much. It was right against the chimney, and it was an enormous statue of a woman, called Maia. This was very much criticized by people. Neither Erskine nor I was ever perfectly happy about that statue, but it was too late to change it. Erskine believed thoroughly in an artist's having his own right of way, and so did I, so we never gave any suggestions, but we would have liked to have had something a little more representative of what Erskine felt was beautiful. It was heavy, massive; it had a certain nobility, but nothing else.

We also had Bufano down there and that was the beginning of many troubles which I cannot go into because of the details that ensued from it, and I don't understand them all. He made the most beautiful little figures; they're worth going up to

Field: see, they're so lovely. They are two little children standing in a spray of water, and all around them are the tiles. My son-in-law helped my husband lay the pieces, and they were made the basis of the fountain.

The Garden and the Goats

I have been trying to show Erskine's marvelous sense of life, his wanting things to go on, as it were, and this was true of the planting. It was so typical of him that in the little area around our arbor, in the court, he wanted to sit under his own "vine and fig," so we started vines. Everybody smiled to themselves I'm sure, wondering if he'd ever live to see those vines grown. Well, he not only lived to see them grown, but covering the arbor and giving him gorgeous bunches of white and purple grapes. So about the time they were ripe and the trouble with the yellowjackets started, the whole court smelled sweet with grapes. It was a great happiness to me that he did live to sit under them. There was also a little fig tree there when we came, but it hadn't been cared for. He set to work to graft it with fine kinds of figs, and I'm happy to say he sat under that, too.

I had an exhibition of something that is rather foreign to me and that I needed to learn, and that is to live always with your face as far toward the future as possible. Not to say, "I must look down now and plant annuals and small plants," but begin to plant right away, no matter how old you are, important things. I'm sure it's one of the things that helped me at what for me was a later age to start on a difficult and complex work, Barabbas. That took years, and many poets might have said, "Oh, I'd rather spend those years writing lyrics," or other small things. But I am sure that his example helped me feel that if I had the energy and the ability, I ought to turn to some larger subject.

Erskine lived always in the present moment that faced toward the future. I'd like to put it that way. He lived the present moment wholly and fully, always facing toward the future.

Another thing that was so wonderful in his nature was his sense of humor. He was a glorious raconteur; he could tell a story in a way that just brought down the dinner table every time.

Fry: I remember in a letter his telling how he brought home a little

Fry: goat, and all his rationalizations that went into it.

Field: Yes. He loved to make much of that. I had had a taste of goat milk and I'd had a taste of falling in love with the goats while we were at this place, and when I heard that the woman wanted to sell them, I just insisted that we have them. We had to build a corral for them, and they soon gave forth young, and Erskine's joke was that while I had taken a glass of goat's milk and said how good it would be for one to drink, I never touched another glass of it. [Laughter] But I loved the goats, and it was a great sorrow to me when one of them strangled itself. She kept following us everywhere, and when we had to go to town one day we tied her to a tree and she strangled herself on the rope.* The other one we had to sell, because we found it was just too much for Vincent to look after them.

Erskine used to love to go visit an Italian woman and her husband. She was so strong she could lift a keg full of wine and move it. Her husband [laughs] made, surreptitiously, liquors for sale, and she had some special ones that he [Colonel Wood] enjoyed very much. She baked bread in a brick oven outside, and I think it was the best bread I ever ate in my life. We'd have bread and a glass of wine and some cheese, and that would be our supper. And a good one it was. That was down in the valley, toward Santa Cruz.

She had to get up in the night to watch the wine; it can only ferment so much, you know, and then it has to be stopped. She made a wonderful liqueur, which was particularly delicate. I think it was made out of walnuts.

Colonel Wood's Religious and Political Views

I wish that I could paint Erskine's portrait in words so that you could get the wonder of his versatility. He was so strong and so vigorous, and whenever he made a protest against injustice or wrong he would show enormous anger, a kind of righteous anger, and yet in all his human relations he was so gentle and so tender, and especially with little children. It's almost impossible to imagine a nature that could have these seemingly opposing sides, but as I look back I see they were not opposing, the very tenderness he felt for human beings and the love he had for humanity made him hate war so, made him righteously indignant at the infringements on human beings. He over and over again told the story of coming out to the West and seeing the timber lands gradually absorbed by a few, at the expense of the many.

*Actually one of the police dogs killed it. S.B.F.W. was not told the truth. (K.C.)

Fry: I'll read this quote from Erskine in a letter and see if you can explain it to me. Schwartz asked him about his religious ideas and if they'd changed, and Erskine told him yes, that he gradually became an agnostic. First he lost faith in the power of prayer and then became an agnostic. He then said, "The only true, wise scheme of creation is one which annihilates each generation, animal or vegetable, to use the same matter over again and so make possible the perpetual circle." What does he mean?

Field: He was speaking at that time as a pure materialist. He only meant that it annihilated matter, and at that time he didn't seem to find, as Freud didn't, the evidences of spirit in man. He thought that spirit lived as long as the body did, and with the death of the body--or of anything, of a leaf, or a dog, or a flower--all that material was absorbed back into nature to be re-used again. It expressed the great economy of nature. I wouldn't like to say definitely that he ever made a statement that he changed later, but as I read to him books dealing with Oriental philosophy, especially the Vedanta philosophy, he became extremely interested. He said it was logical; he couldn't bear anything that didn't appeal to the brain, too. Then if it extended into an explanation of spirit, very well. I can only tell you that in the last few days before his death, when he came out of his rather dazed and blinded times of not really remembering things correctly, he suddenly had a very illumined moment and he called me to him and put his arm around me and he said, "Darling, when I am well," and he emphasized that, as if it meant something in the way of a healing that wouldn't be of the body, "we will study that great philosophy together." That's as far as I would wish to say that he went. And it wasn't because he was getting old, because as I told you he never seemed to be impressed by his years. But also he never made a definite statement of belief.

Fry: It was a sort of ongoing question with him, then?

Field: Yes. But he had told me years back that nothing could shake him from his belief in the unity of matter. He had come to it after years of thought and there was no use trying to make him any different about it. I thought it was interesting that with the progress of the years and of our life together, he did become much more supple in his thought.

Fry: Did he attend any Vedanta services?

Field: Well, he was pretty old when I began to go, once in a while. Of course the swami's accent was a little difficult for him; his hearing wasn't too good. I felt it was better for us to read it from the books.

Fry: I had a question or two on his anarchism, as it related to the

- Fry: events that were going on around him at the time. Did he take any part during Roosevelt's campaign?
- Field: Yes. As he said, he took every wagon going his way. He took no active part; he was too deeply involved in his work. He did for Wilson, before that. He felt as far as immediacy of goals, that the Democratic Party represented the most liberal and forward-looking party, and he associated himself with it. He campaigned so well for Wilson that Oregon went Democratic for the first time in many years, and Wilson offered him the choice of any position in Oregon that he wanted to have. But he asked only for a friend of his who was in great difficulty and was capable of fulfilling it, to have the postmaster generalship.
- Fry: The Democrats believed more in federal regulation--
- Field: No, I would say they didn't. Federal regulations as a necessity had grown. They were states' rights people, and that was one of the reasons Erskine liked them. That was a tendency toward his anarchistic views that people should govern themselves.
- Fry: What was his reaction to Roosevelt's first hundred days?
- Field: Oh, very favorable. The needs of the country were too large to be handled by the states, and he was with Roosevelt heart and soul.
- Fry: He was for the regulation of banks?
- Field: Well, he believed in what they call free banking, which is an anarchistic idea of banking in which a farmer can bring his produce as a deposit, so to speak. I don't think that was primary in his mind.
- Fry: Did he think railroads should be federally owned?
- Field: Yes, definitely. He believed in public ownership of everything that really belonged to the public--utilities of all kinds. That's really why he and I met; I had come from Cleveland, where Tom Johnson worked so hard for city ownership of utilities.
- Fry: He mentioned in the Schwartz letter that civil rights were a kind of first step toward anarchism, that civil rights statutes needed to be strengthened. Did he feel that the Constitution was simply being ignored, or that we needed more freedoms through constitutional amendments?
- Field: Well, I ought to say that I think he would believe that either method that had hope of achieving its end would be a good one.

Field: My dear, you understand that he didn't believe that a man couldn't own, as he once put it, his own toothbrush, his own home. But he believed--let us put it as religious people would--that those things that God had put on this earth for us all should be owned by all, and that one of the great reasons for extreme poverty on one hand and riches on the other was private ownership of public things.

He moved as he saw the direction of the wind; he moved if it went his way. Emma Goldman thought he was a traitor in a way, though she loved him very much, because he didn't work more directly. But he didn't believe in that way of working. He believed anarchism could only come through slow evolution.

Fry: He mentions in this letter that he felt he owed much to you; he says, "I only regret that Sara came so late in my life, and I will not attempt to further say how much of growth and hope and expectation for the race I owe to her." This letter was written during Roosevelt's second administration. When you first knew Erskine, before the twenties, did you feel he had lost a certain amount of faith in the growth of the human race?

Field: Well, I wouldn't think so, but he felt that his enthusiasm and hope were greatly enhanced in some way by my--I came from a city where all the things that he believed in were trying to be practiced. I think it did bring something to him. There were so few people who understood him, or even would listen to him.

Fry: Did World War I affect his hopes? His idealism for the race?

Field: Well, he was very much against that war. I don't think that a man who believed it will take many centuries to accomplish what he wanted could ever be daunted, even by so terrible a catastrophe as that war. I wish I had copies of the correspondence between him and Sir Gilbert Parker in England, because he denied vigorously Wilson's statement, "the war to end war." Parker believed that that was so, that this war would end all power that stood in the way of world peace, and Erskine did not believe that. He felt it was a trade war, a rivalry between Germany and England for access to India, and he argued vigorously. You only have to read The Poet in the Desert to see how much he hated war. Nevertheless, when the second world war came, I think he felt, as I did, that there wasn't anything for it but to get rid of a man who was doing such

Field: atrocious things.

The Final Years

Fry: I wanted to ask you how you and Erskine lived after his heart attack--those years from 1937--

Field: We lived, if possible, a little more quietly, although we never had lived a feverish life. The doctor came down and measured for himself the distance to the studio to see if he felt that Erskine could climb up there to work, and he said to us that if we put certain resting places along the path he could go on going up there. He loved that little studio so. So we did that, and he went up there every day. I can't see that our life was very much altered until toward the very last, the last two years. Those years were very hard on him, because he could stand anything but a betrayal, and there was a betrayal in his life by one he had utterly trusted.

Fry: In this letter he goes into how much you have meant in his life.
[Reads from Schwartz letter]

Field: Those of course are the words of a lover, and a devoted husband, who exaggerates what I did for him. Of course I can't see it that way at all. But I think we both helped each other. He certainly gave me a more clear vision of what progress should be. I had pretty much stopped with Henry George's Progress and Poverty, and I think that he helped me to go further--he and Debs, just listening to Debs speak. I am sure that there can't be a relationship as close and as great as ours without one giving to the other an almost indefinable influence. You only know you're growing, that's all. He knew he was and I knew I was. There was always growth there; I don't remember any stagnant pools.

[end of interview]

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APPENDIX

SARA BARD FIELD ON ROBINSON JEFFERS, an interview conducted by
Amelia R. Fry and Father Robert J. Brophy

[August 22, 1963]

Brophy: I'll start with something that is very much of an enigma to me about Jeffers. It seems to me that he is trying to tell people in this poem "The Roan Stallion" why he's writing with these themes that some people were objecting to and some people were taking as a new freedom, the type of thing they react to in Henry Miller now. It seems to me he's trying to explain that. He is saying, "I write tragedies of this sort so they won't happen to me." That's what it seems to be and it strikes me as very strange. In other places he seems to say he writes these things to instruct mankind to turn away from themselves.

Field: That's a point. I don't think the other is true at all, that he is worried about himself.

Brophy: The trouble is though that in the central part of this poem ["Apology for Bad Dreams"], which is the central poem, I think, in that volume, he says rather bluntly, I think; "I said in my heart, 'Better invent than suffer: imagine victims lest your own flesh be chosen the agonist, or you martyr some creature to the beauty of the place.' And I said, 'Burn sacrifices once a year to magic horror away from the house, this little house here you have built over the ocean with your own hands, beside the standing boulders: for what are we, the beast that walks upright, with speaking lips, and a little hair, to think we should always be fed, sheltered, intact, and self-controlled? We sooner more liable than the other animals. Pain and terror, the insanities of desire; not accidents but essential...' I made them phantoms to follow, they have hunted the phantoms and missed the house."

Now what he's saying, at least in these lines, is that he wrote these things so the wolves would not come to his house. Strangely, he repeats this in one of his last poems, the one that came out in April, the collected poems that he had written in the last years of his life. He repeats the same lines. He says, "I...wrote to myself: 'Make sacrifices once a year to magic horror away from the house.'" He said, "So I listened to my Demon warning me that evil would come if my work ceased, if I did not make sacrifice of storied and imagined lives, Tamar and Cawdor and Thurso's wife-- 'Imagined victims be our redeemers.' At that time I was sure

Brophy: of my fates and felt my poems guarding the house, well-made watchdogs ready to bite. But time sucks out the juice, a man grows ~~old~~ and indolent."

Field: Well, Father, I feel that whatever he may have imagined mystically about this turning in on himself, that that was secondary to his profound belief that humanity had turned in on itself, as you say, that it committed incest inasmuch as instead of communing and sharing itself with nature, which, you know, he believed was the great act of our lives, that they were always getting together in human communication. I saw a letter to Mark Van Doren in which he explained that quite fully. He had a hatred of this kind of clinging to each other and not sharing life in its depths with nature, which he adored.

Brophy: I think that would represent him much more than what I think he's expressing here, or what I suggest he might be expressing. The thing that bothered me was: Was there a place in his life, a corner of his psyche or his personality, that had a belief in, well, superstition or occultism or parapsychology? I've tried to figure out just what he could mean by such a thing that he could affect what would happen to him also by--

Field: I think he was a highly mystical person and a very sensitive person and that dwelling, as a poet has to do on any subject he is writing about, dwelling deeply on it, he got these illusions. But that they were illusions, you might say, is practically illustrated by the fact that he had no brothers or sisters or others to "commit incest" with and that down deep in his heart, unless he felt that a relationship with others was in itself a kind of incest--because again it was depending on letting what he called the beast in him have the betterment of seeking satisfaction through a human being rather than through nature. I think here you have the secret of it more.

I know from my own humble effort that a poet can't dwell very intently, as he has to, on a subject of that type or any type--when I was writing Barabbas, I found this out. When I had to write the parts of, you might say, the bloody outbreaks, I found that my dreams at night were very bad. I really feel that that is the--

Fry: You mean your dreams were gory too?

Field: They were gory. I would dream that I had killed somebody. Well, the last thing in the world under normal circumstances that I would do would be to even harm anybody. The last thing that Robinson Jeffers, I think, would have done would have been to really have any incestuous relations, even if he could have.
[Laughter]

Brophy: Yes. I hadn't been thinking about that particular angle. You're saying, though, that your writing Barabbas led you to have dreams that were upsetting. Jeffers seems to indicate both in this poem and the last poem that he had dreams or fears that upset him and he wrote these poems to avoid what seemed to be portents in the dreams. Well, anyway, maybe this is not getting anywhere--

Field: Yes, I think it is. I think we're discussing the fact that a poet can have dreams and portents which have a different significance from their personal and immediate ones, perhaps not personal, but from their seemingly personal answer.

I think incest with him was all types of communion, you might say--or communication is a better word--with human beings. I think he moved a way out far, very far out, when he first built there. When we first knew them, there wasn't a house hardly in view except the house of Una's former husband.

Fry: Sara, I wondered, in speaking of this seeming reference we have here to superstition of Jeffers, if a poet like Jeffers is the sort of person who actually has many corners in his mind and that sometimes you notice new things that come out and appear, which you hadn't really felt were there before.

Brophy: Someone asked him once whether he was superstitious and he said, "When good things happen to me, I have a fear that something bad will happen to counteract that."

Fry: Do you think he had this deep feeling that along with the beautiful and good, somehow, there always had to be a bad?

Field: Oh, I think undoubtedly he had very deep feelings and perhaps even fears, and things happened in his life that could have confirmed that. But I really think that if you realize the emphasis that he placed on this dreadful, you might say, utter dependence of man on man, without going out to nature to get his strength and health, that this could be a symbolic thing and also be what I say, that when you dwell heavily on something, because he had to take a specific case to illustrate this non-specific idea, I think, as I said, that then you dream such things. I think you'll find any psychoanalyst will tell you that, any psychiatrist.

Fry: You do think, then, that Jeffers had this foreboding. Here's what I'm really specifically thinking, Sara. If he found love and acceptance in his life, as apparently he did with Una--

Field: Oh, very deeply felt.

- Fry: Then this brought along with it a sort of automatic foreboding that somewhere there had to be provisions made for potential brutality and uglier things in life.
- Field: I think very likely that was so. He wasn't a man to discuss his inner feelings deeply. It was very hard to get at them and, of course, neither my husband or I ever approached him in the terms that an investigator would, one that was going to write about him. We were interested in his ideas, of course, and discussed those. Yet, we never felt that we had really touched the deep personal feelings that he had. I think he loved us because he felt that we too had moved far away up in the hills to get away from the "herd," as he called it, and that drew us close together. But he never discussed it. He just said once how he loved the fact that we lived so remotely.
- Brophy: Did he ever really discuss his poems with anybody? Did he discuss why he should take up certain themes or what he meant by his rather stark statements? I have the impression that he didn't want to talk about his poetry very much.
- Field: No, he didn't. He felt it ought to speak for itself.
- Brophy: A number of people have said that he didn't read it over himself afterwards, that it was as though he got something finished, perhaps off his mind, and then he'd set it aside. He wouldn't go back and read what he'd done before.
- Field: I don't think he could have accomplished as much as he did, the amounts of writing he did, if he had gone back to do that. Now, some poets, of course, have to do it. They feel they have to lay their poem aside for a while and then go back to it and take a fresh look at it and do a great deal of correction on it. I don't think that he felt he had the time for that, or the inclination to.

He was the least egotistic man that I think I have ever seen. Whatever he may have been like deep down within (which, as I say, he never discussed), on the surface he was the most modest creature. He also was the most tolerant, as you'll see by Una's letter in answer to a rather severe criticism that I made of "Solstice" in this paper. I'll loan this to you because it would take too much of your time to go into that now, but she answers that. She was his spokesman often. I don't know whether it was because he wanted her to be or because she just felt that somebody had to be.

Do you remember "Solstice" pretty well?

- Brophy: Is this the Madrone family? Yes, I do.

Field: Yes. I called it "beauty dedicated to reaction." You know, it's full of reaction against all liberal ideas. That was a strange thing, that both Una and he had no conception whatsoever of the necessity of progress through suffering. He so detested, as we all do, war and all kinds of violence, which we did too, no one more so than my husband and I. But I think we both saw that it is only through suffering that good can come, unfortunately. It seems to be the law of life.

In "Solstice," you see, the reaction is so violent and so predominant, and he is so definite in feeling that we have to go back to nature and find all our healing there.

Brophy: So social amelioration was out of the question?

Field: Yes. And that would be beautiful if we could. That would be a beautiful way to do if we could do it, but that isn't the way it's ever happened. Look at how the slaves were at least temporarily freed--partially freed, let's put it--through the Civil War, and how our revolution, our freedom, and our ability to make a unique government in the world that was copied by other nations that loved democracy came also through revolution and bloodshed. I feel that he was just so against it that he couldn't see any good coming out of it at all.

He says here, for instance, in this book [Solstice], "From lives much worse than death, decaying to an average, growing to be like all the other insects that fill the cities and defile the country? That listen to imbecile songs and love to breathe each other, and eat and drink and make love in common, swarming for pleasure; and from time to time a war or a revolution rakes them up like dry straws in a stack and burns them. They hurrah with joy. Better the babies died than such lives for them."

You see, that theme runs all the way through his poetry. I know how shocked I was when Erskine, my husband, and I had been so moved by Pearl Buck's first book on China, The Good Earth, and they were just horrified by it. They said, "The thought of those swarming people!" Well, the answer wasn't that they could go back to nature, because how would they turn? Where would they get the necessary living on a practical side?

But anyway, I wrote this--I hope it isn't too severe, but somewhat severe--review, which perhaps you'd like to take and borrow.

Brophy: I would very much.

Field: You can give it back to Mrs. Fry because I have no other copy.

- Field: In answering it, she [Una] recognizes that it was written in love of him, but in sorrow. She says, "That was a beautiful and thoughtful review of Robinson's 'Solstice,' but, of course, I disagreed in spots." So, you'll see. And then she goes on to explain why. She denied altogether that he is a reactionary and tried to build up a case for that. Would you like to take that?
- Brophy: I certainly would.
- Field: Now, this is very precious to me. I wouldn't lose it for anything because this is the only letter--I've had many letters from her, but it's the only letter in which she goes into detail about his philosophy, so that ought to help you. She understood him better than anybody.
- Brophy: I guess she was the other part of himself. He seemed to need everything that she had in her personality.
- Field: Oh, he needed her with an almost suffering need. When that evil time occurred when they went down to Mabel Luhan's place--maybe you don't know about that?
- Brophy: No, I did hear about that. Since you bring that up, one question has come up about that. Why didn't Una--it would seem natural in that type of situation to shoot this other woman instead of shooting herself. Didn't she shoot herself?
- Field: Yes, she shot herself.
- Brophy: Why wouldn't she shoot this person who'd done this?
- Field: I can't answer that. Once she said to me in discussion of just such an idea, but never dreaming it would happen, that anyone who tried to take Robinson away from her she would shoot, and she had good strong Irish determination. But she and I never discussed this too deeply and what we did was told me in confidence and I still, even in death, don't feel I could say all of it.
- Brophy: Well, Mr. Lilienthal is the other man that said something about that. He confused me on it because he said he thought that she had tried to shoot Mabel Luhan and had shot herself by mistake, which sounds to me impossible. I don't understand how that could happen.
- Field: No, I don't understand that either.
- Brophy: Unless there was a struggle, and he didn't say anything about that.

- Field: I knew from the very first when they began to go down there that trouble would happen. Mabel Luhan, I am not afraid to say, was one of the most evil-minded people I ever knew in relation to deliberately wanting to set lover against lover, man against his wife. I know of three different marriages she disturbed that had been smooth and happy. The very fact that she could get her fangs into Robinson is extremely strange to me, under the circumstances--I mean, by the circumstances of his love for Una and devotion to her--but she did and the results were tragic. I think he never forgave himself, or if he did, it was only a half-hearted forgiveness. One feels that that very last poem, which you must read--
- Brophy: Now I did read that. It was printed in a trade edition. That was Hungerfield, wasn't it, the beginning of Hungerfield?
- Field: It's about four or five pages, a long, long section before he begins the story.
- Field: I know, in which he addresses Una and death and his struggle with death, as if he'd almost physically struggled with death at her bedside.
- Brophy: It's very beautiful, and that leads him into the story of the man who supposedly did struggle with death and overcame death and what happens. But it's a very moving introduction.
- Field: Oh, it's a very moving--
- Brophy: It's more interesting to me than the story itself that follows, which it's introductory to. It's one of the few places where he lets his feelings of love toward persons or personalities come out.
- Field: Absolutely! You're very keen to see that. It's the only place I know.
- Brophy: Yes. He writes one place in one of the later poems ["The Shears"] about his daughter-in-law. It's a very little snatch, but he shows that he has love toward her.
- Field: Yes. I think that she was one of the sweetest young women I ever met, and her effort not to take Una's place, because she knew she couldn't do that, after her death, but her effort to do the things for Robin that Una had done was touching to see.
- Brophy: I think that comes out in this one little--it's not that he expresses that, but he expresses by a few lines an affection that he had toward her that startles me in his poetry.

- Field: I don't remember the one. Do you remember what poem that's in? It must be a very much later one.
- Brophy: It's possibly one of these. [Looks through papers]
- Field: Where did you get that? Did you buy it?
- Brophy: These were a collection of poems that Mrs. [Melba Berry] Bennett and Mr. [Theodore Max] Lilienthal went over and there were about fifty or sixty poems. Mr. Lilienthal thought they were mostly written toward the very end of his life. He said many were incoherent and unfinished, so they dropped them, but they collected what they could.
- Field: I suppose that Donnan [Jeffers] turned over all the papers to him?
- Brophy: Donnan said that he didn't know it. He turned over the entire library--well, whatever papers Robin left--to Mrs. Bennett. She just came into the house. He, I guess, asked her to take this and he himself didn't know anything about what had been left or what poems they were or what was in the effects. So, Mrs. Bennett and Mr. Lilienthal chose those which were completed and clear poems. Some of them are good. I expected a very strange--
- Field: I wonder if I could--I know Mr. Lilienthal very well. He had a press at one time.
- Brophy: Yes. Quercus.
- Field: Does he still have it, the Quercus?
- Brophy: I don't think so.
- Field: He printed one of my poems, and, as I say, I knew him quite well. He had a book store with a man named [Leon] Gelber for a long time in San Francisco--Gelber and Lilienthal. I think I'm going to be bold enough to write him for a copy.
- Brophy: Well, this is a Random House book. This has been put out by Random House.
- Field: Oh, it has? Oh, so it's on the market?
- Brophy: Last April, yes.
- Field: Oh well, I'll call up the book stores and find out if I can get it. I have all of Jeffers except this Hungerfield, which, as I say, I--
- Brophy: It's a big sacrifice.

Field: Yes. I don't feel it was a very acceptable gift to God, or to the Bancroft, because I keep wishing I hadn't done it!
[Laughter]

Brophy: That means you are a human being.

Field: I want it back again. That indication to Una is so touching. I loved her so much and she suffered a great deal, you know, at that time. It was tragic.

Brophy: Well, you should have done a trade with them, because there was a trade edition of Hungerfield. I know the special edition that you're talking about.* I've never seen it, but I've seen it in--

Field: Beautiful! [Inaudible] did, you know, and he did just, I think, a hundred copies for friends for Christmas and he sent it to me. My husband was gone then and he sent it to me.

Brophy: Random House published it and a number of other poems later. If you don't have that, the University should give you a little trade.

Field: Well, I should say so. I will write Random House today or as soon as Chita helps me. I can't see very well any more. I'm losing my sight fast, but I have an idea that I could learn to type.

Well, Father, have you any other questions that I could help you with? They're all difficult questions, I know, because he was a very mute man with regard to his own self. You have to read him through his poetry.

Brophy: Yes. He had the philosophy that I think you've covered very well about turning out and having this communion with nature and this was the salvation for a man. He said so many things connected with this that I have gotten the feeling that he was trying to compensate for opposite feelings in himself.

Now, for instance, he says in a number of places that he has no fear of death, that he welcomes death as a deliverance from this life. Yet, he writes about death with somewhat of a suggestion of a horror for it, a fascination for it, but a horror of the dissolution of the body. There is a contradiction there that suggests to me that he was trying to talk himself maybe into an acceptance of death, an acceptance of a type of immortality.

*This was an edition of Hungerfield consisting of thirty copies printed by the Grabhorn Press in 1952. Sara Bard Field presented her copy to The Bancroft Library.

- Brophy: He seems to want to seek an immortality in many of the things that he did and, yet, he has to, because of his scientific background and his rejection of his father's religion and all orthodox or revealed religion, pass by any possibility of a soul separated from the body.
- Field: Oh, I think he had no such belief at all. I think he may have had, under his disbelief, that hope that everyone carries. I feel that breaks through once in a while.
- Brophy: That's the feeling that I have and I wondered if that were true. He seems to have a hope for man, although he may constantly talk about him as a misstep in evolution and as an insect, a perversion, and various other things. He seems to have a hope for what man could be. But maybe he's protecting himself against being caught in a naive stance and so he never reveals this or he speaks the opposite.
- Field: Yes. I don't think he had a great deal of praise for man anyway. I know he did have for a few individuals, but he didn't think they were typical of the race. He felt they were exceptions. I remember definitely talking to him about that once.
- Brophy: Did he show a fear of death? I mean, this is a normal thing. It's nothing, I would say, that he should have been ashamed of, but he strikes me as sometimes, to use the expression, whistling in the dark, as though he's afraid of something and he's saying, "I'm not afraid of it. I will be joined with the universe. I'll become part of the sunrise and part of the ocean and part of the grass and flowers and so forth."
- Field: No, I never detected any fear of death in him. I detected fear of death for Una in especially Hungerfield. It shows marked terror, really, almost at times. But for himself, I never had the feeling that he was afraid.
- Brophy: Do you think he was convinced that this was the great salvation for himself and for anyone, to become again a more intimate part of the universe?
- Field: Oh, I do definitely! At least I think he held that theory. Now, you know very well from your own inner life that a man can hold a theory and feel that it's the sincere expression of himself and yet, there will be part of himself that hasn't accepted the theory. Now, whether he had some inner fear of death which he was trying to relieve by this belief that you speak of, of becoming part of all the beauty of nature once more, I think that remains an open question.
- Brophy: Yes, I imagine it would have to with a man like that.

- Field: It would have to. He seemed always to me to be an escapist. He was trying to escape all the hurts of life that he could and most of the hurts came from the kind of civilization that we have at present. He ran away from that, except as he wrote about it. But physically, I mean, in his personal life, he avoided crowds. He got out of every social engagement that he could possibly do with any kind of degree of decency to Una, because she was a much more social being. She may have agreed with his ideas and did. She loved living out there in the wilds, as it was then.
- Brophy: How much contact did he keep with the world? I remember one critic wrote that he could not accept Jeffers' poetry because he was not with his age; he was condemning something that he was not in and did not know. He was talking about Jeffers and a number of other people when he was saying this, but he pointed out Jeffers as an example. Did he keep, say, through magazines and newspapers and radio and through Una herself, contact with people so that you think that he really had a sense of what people were like?
- Field: I don't think he had any sense of what they were like, but I think he always knew what they were doing.
- Brophy: That's a good distinction. What they were doing would turn out to be many times the sensational, which would confirm him in what he already thought. I mean, crime is much better news material than the love that we have for each other or the slow progress that's made.
- Field: Yes. And Una was always, in the early days, hunting, so to speak, for the right story to bring him. I think she was responsible for "Tamar" to a large degree. She heard of a case somewhat like it and told him the details. She'd go out and she'd visit these forsaken houses, you know, and get him to go and see them and then he'd build a story around them.
- He really lived as nearly the life of the solitary man as he could. Having married, and with children, he couldn't do it entirely, but he was more close to the solitary.
- Brophy: It's funny. Mr. Lilienthal made that point very much too, that Una used to suggest to him many, many of his themes. She used to bring stories and say, "Why don't you write about that?" Or she'd find a ranch and say, "Why don't you write a story about this particular thing?"
- Field: Yes!
- Brophy: And I asked him if she did suggest these things, did her ideas enter into his poetry? I'm inclined to think myself that they

Brophy: didn't, that she just gave stories that he could use, but his ideas were entirely his own.

Field: Well, I don't think you could say entirely his own. I think she shared. I mean, I don't think she gave him any of those ideas. I think they were in his blood and bones, but I do think she shared them. When you read this refutation of my insistence that Jeffers is not a forward-looking person, she denies that very much and very heartily.

Brophy: You see, that was one of the questions in that original question that I asked you. I asked you about the possibility of belief in spirits or in occult matters, in magic or preternatural powers. One of the questions that came to my mind was that perhaps this type of thing was something that Una was more interested in than he was.

Field: Well, I think at times she picked it up, particularly automatic writing. She had a friend who did it, and perhaps also in the medium, you know. I think perhaps they didn't involve her too much, but she was fascinated by them.

Brophy: I know they were fascinated by Yeats and Yeats used this very much.

Field: Oh, very much! I should say so. His second wife--no, his only wife. One thinks of Maude Gonne as the woman who should have been his first wife. [Laughter] Well, his wife, as you know, did automatic writing.

Brophy: And he used this as his symbolism, really. He built up, or tried to build, quote a bit of symbolism to support his poetry on this very thing.

Field: Yes. Anything that Yeats did would be of interest to him because they simply adored him. I don't think they knew him very well as a friend, but they adored his poetry.

Brophy: Well, he has some of the very same ideas--the end of the cycle, the closing of an age, the second coming, the destruction that's coming on. This was a great theme in Yeats' poetry and it is in Jeffers', although I don't see any influence really. I can't read Jeffers' and say, well, this echoes anything of Yeats.

Field: No, I don't think it does. I think it's wholly original.

Brophy: Yes. In "Tamar," there's quite a bit of occult happening. There is the Aunt Helen that was her brother's lover [who] comes and speaks through the voice of Stella. I would presume that you would take this normally as a dramatic way of presenting the

Brophy: story. I mean, it doesn't have to mean that he believed in anything like that.

Field: Oh, no! I think that like Shakespeare, he was big enough to absorb all these ideas, because they do exist in his poetry, but not necessarily embrace them. No one would say that Shakespeare believed in ghosts because of the father in Hamlet.

Fry: Can I put a question here about Una? The question came up once, when I was talking to someone else about Jeffers, about what it was that attracted Una to Jeffers. We were trying to figure out her relationship in the marriage? Do you know what it was about Jeffers that she cherished particularly, because he must have been a pretty difficult man to live with?

Field: Well, I think she recognized first that here was a powerful person--I mean, he could be powerful in expression--and his whole personality fascinated her because she was of a very Romantic turn. She used to love the Romantic period very much and I think that he represented to her all that was different from other people and she liked that.

Fry: Is that the picturesque--?

Field: Yes, and the man who lived differently. He was a young man. He was a rebel against his early environment. Oh, I can see without being able to express in words, unless I thought about it a long time, what it was that attracted her. I can feel it more. I can see it.

Fry: Were they equal in their marriage or did Una more or less provide a lot of the initiative?

Field: Oh, she provided a great deal of the initiative. She was a very dominating woman and I think he wished her to be, to a certain extent. I remember one day he was telling me rather humorously about how she gave a Latin lesson to her boys [Donnan and Garth Jeffers], because in early years she did all the teaching of them. They wouldn't send them to school. They were pretty far away and I think perhaps Jeffers didn't want them to mingle with the "herd." Jeffers told me how she would get angry with the boys because they weren't really prepared for their lessons or at least weren't reciting them well, and she would suddenly throw the book across the room. He laughed and said, "Well, that's Una for you!"

Brophy: Were they disappointed in the fact that the boys didn't seem to have any of the interests of the mother or father? This is perhaps

- Brophy: wrong for me to say this because I don't know them that well, but from everything I have heard about them, they don't reflect any of this very rich classical and literary education that was offered by their mother and father. They'd read to them and discuss ideas with them and teach them languages and so forth.
- Field: I think, Father, they suffered the fate of all children of a great man. They were too much under the shadow of his greatness and I think they were, deep down, a disappointment to him. I can't place my finger on any reason that--Una particularly had been so extravagant in her admiration of them as little boys. These pictures I have here for you to look at. [Shows pictures] They show the attitude the little fellows had that makes you realize why she was proud of them. They had a kind of a strong, almost disdainful look about them. Here's another one to look at. You can see what strong, almost disdainful looking children they were. They didn't have a very happy childhood. They were too much alone. They were way out there. As I say, you must try to visualize that place before Carmel began to increase the way it has. They would play on the beach and people said that their talking was even like the seagulls. It was a strange kind of seagull talk.
- Fry: When they were very young, you mean?
- Field: Yes, this was when they were young.
- Brophy: This strikes me as very, very strange in him. I read the day before yesterday a manuscript that Mrs. Bennett--I brought this name up. I don't know whether you know her or not.
- Field: Yes, I've met her, but she didn't make much impression on me.
- Brophy: She did a lot of work with his relatives in Pennsylvania and she found out, either by letters or by talking with them, quite a bit about the mother and father and the life that he led when he was very small. She has fifty or sixty pages in the Bancroft Library here just on his life up to the point where he came to California. It seems as though what he's doing with his own children is the very thing that he revolted against his father for when he was small. His father made him learn Latin, learn Greek, and he was very strict with him, but not just that. His father wouldn't let other people come to the house and when he saw that maybe they would, he moved the family outside of town so that Robin didn't have any companions and he became very stilted in his language, very bookish, and developed a dislike for his father and, yet, a likeness for his father. His father was very aloof and didn't want to mix with people. He wanted to stay in his study and read and write.

Brophy: His mother seemed to be very much like Una. She was very sociable and had many friends and they just gradually became less and less.

Now, maybe this is ignorance on my part of human psychology, but I would expect a man like that to say, "Well, I'm going to do differently with my children," because he seemed to have suffered from this situation in his family. But his father had forced so many things on him and forced a rather antisocial childhood or isolated childhood, anyway.

Field: Well, I would too. I think that happens to many parents. They want their children to have a very different life from what they had. Now, my husband was brought up by a naval surgeon, the first surgeon general of our whole Navy, and he was brought up in a very strict fashion. The place for every tool was labeled and if the father found one out of its place, there was hell to pay. The boys had to walk a very straight line.

The two older boys were sent, the one to Annapolis and my husband to West Point, without even being asked, because the salary of the surgeon general even wasn't very great and he had a number of children and this gave him a chance to have two children educated at the government's expense. So, anyway and also, he believed in that kind of discipline and training.

My husband hated every bit of it and, later, got out of the Army as fast as he could and went into law and always was [inaudible]. But he brought up his children completely differently. Now, he let them have such a great freedom that they were known in Portland, Oregon, as the worst children in the city. [Laughter] They did anything without reproof, which is going, of course, in the other extreme. While I think it didn't turn out tragically, I think one child at least I can think of wasn't helped any by that lack of any supervision whatsoever.

Brophy: It seemed to be clear from what evidence she [Mrs. Bennett] had that Robin resented what his father had done to him. I guess his children were put through the same type of life for other reasons. At least in his own mind, Robin would justify it by saying, "I don't want them getting into the same trap that all these other people are getting into. I'll raise them in my philosophy, which I think will save them from becoming self-centered."

Field: Yes. I think by the time the children came his ideas had taken shape and his hatred of mass dwelling together was so great that he wanted to protect his boys from what he felt were the evil results of that and Una did too.

- Brophy: Did he ever express any feelings toward his mother or father? Did he resent his father? He wrote a very nice poem about his father, that he respected him for having beliefs that he couldn't hold, but having much more peace of soul and attaining a serenity in old age that he didn't expect.
- Field: Well, he didn't talk about it, but he referred to his father always with the greatest respect. I can't say affection because he wasn't a man to show affection very much for anyone. I don't ever remember his speaking of his mother.
- Brophy: Is that right? I would expect that he would be much closer to his mother.
- Field: Well, now, he may have, you know. One can't remember everything. It was a long friendship and there were long times between seeing each other and I, as you see, am not young now and haven't as good a memory as I once had. So, it's very likely that I could have forgotten his references to his mother, but I don't remember his talking about her. I do remember two or three references to his father, always very respectful.
- Brophy: I had a question that I was going to ask quite a while back, but I don't think it is as important now. He talks at times (and Dr. [Lawrence Clark] Powell has written about) the different philosophers that may have influenced him. But since reading that and so forth I've gotten the impression that he would use philosophers if they fitted into his own feelings.
- Field: Absolutely. I think you've hit on a very great truth. Right up to the writing of The Decline of the West, by Spengler--he read that avidly and referred to it several times in our presence. He accepted it wholly.
- Brophy: And he would use Freud's ideas for his plots, perhaps, but just inasmuch as they'd help him express an interesting plot, I guess. I had that feeling too.
- Field: Yes, I think he'd want to, although there again, I never remember talking to him about Freud. I wonder why, as I look back. He [Freud] was, of course, very much in the thought of people but not, I'm ashamed to say, too well understood by my husband and me. My husband was rather antagonistic to so many of Freud's ideas that it sort of prejudiced him against talking about him, I guess.
- Brophy: There was one letter from Una to Bennett Cerf in which she said that they had read--Bennett had sent her a book. Probably it was the Random House edition of selected works of Freud. They have

- Brophy: one of those giant editions. She said they were very glad to receive it, but "we have read all of Freud and we've gone over his work so much that this, of course, is just repetition." So she indicated that they had read and discussed him.
- Field: Oh, I think it's very probable and I don't quite understand why we didn't speak of him more, except, as I say, my husband didn't have very much interest in him.
- Brophy: I would expect him to have read and been very interested in Jung, but I haven't seen any references to it. He seems to work with myths and tends towards archetypal situations and this seems to be what he's trying to express. But I've never seen any clear proof that he had--
- Field: No, I haven't either, but I think Jung wasn't as much appreciated or known in those days. Freud was the one who'd captured the limelight in respect to psychoanalysis and Jung was more a philosopher, perhaps, and he wasn't an analyst. He hadn't come into his own fully in the days when Robin was writing.
- Fry: I got the idea that Una had this sort of outlook sometimes on countries and people that she liked to delve into, understanding then through their myths.
- Field: Oh, very much! Especially Irish.
- Fry: Because of her attitude toward the Irish. Did you notice any of this in other kinds of people, in other groups? I mean, was this a general outlook of hers, or was it just the way she happened to appreciate the Irish?
- Field: Oh, no. I think that Una had a very curious mind--"curious" in the sense of curiosity, not peculiar necessarily, because she wasn't that. But I think she would be interested in myths generally, but she was particularly at home and versed in Irish myth.
- Fry: It seems like some people kind of have this outlook of what today we would call a cultural anthropologist and it's a very fascinating one.
- Field: I know. I wish I had talked to Una more about that, how much she really accepted the Irish myths, and if she did believe, as Ella Young (who was also a great friend of mine and hers) believed. Ella Young believed absolutely in what they call "the little people," and in all those other elements, as it were, or strange elements, along with that category. So I would like to have talked to Una about how much she accepted. I don't think she ever lost a

Field: certain amount of skepticism about myths--I mean, even though it has survived to this day, as it has in Ireland in certain parts.

But of course, they went to Ireland. I had some--I'm afraid they're lost--wonderful letters from her from there. They were particularly going about to see the towers, the different towers.

Brophy: Unfortunately, the only publication that came from that trip to Ireland were the poems, "Descent to the Dead," and these were all preoccupied with these burial mounds.

Field: Yes, I know.

Brophy: This was a preoccupation, as the title suggested, with the dead, with the old. He was very conscious, at least in those poems, of the long antiquity and the thousands of people who had used the same ground and who'd built house upon the ruins of house, grave upon grave.

Field: Yes. Well, that's the sort of thing, you see, Jung would have also been interested in. So, I wish that Jung had entered his life more than he did. He's entering mine late in life very decidedly. I find a great response to him.

Brophy: Yes, so do I. I have maybe my own interpretation of some of the things that he has, but it seems to me that he is saying something very acceptable to me anyway.

Field: Yes. You know that over the door of his house there was a motto that said, "Called or not, God is here." Isn't that wonderful?

Brophy: That is.

Field: I think it's so expressive that lots of people who don't go through any kind of formal approach to God, to show that there's something in their lives that reflects the God that is within us all. I just love that.

Brophy: That is an idea that grows on me from Jeffers. People have attacked him so much as being irreligious and everything of that sort. It strikes me that he is one of the most religious poets that I've read.

Field: I think he was profoundly religious, but not in an orthodox way.

Brophy: And that orthodox way was pretty much blocked off, I think, in the very beginning of his life, it seemed. From what I can

Brophy: gather, there wasn't any crisis that he hit at a particular point. But from his life in this family with his father being this professor--evidently that had done something. Either it presented a way of life which became unacceptable when he saw the other side, when he went to medical school and then he went to various secular colleges and got a different philosophy and a different sense of what the order of the universe was and the causality of the universe was.

Whatever it was, I think early orthodox religion was removed from his reach, and that perhaps this made it more of an agonized searching for God.

Field: I think very likely. And it drew him closer to nature, which, I think, he felt either was God or expressed God more than anything else. Have you made a study--of course, you must have in connection with him--as to those aspects of nature that he loved best?

Brophy: Yes. Now this brings me to two questions I wanted to ask you. One of them is on the type of beauty that he loved, and the other one is on the nature of the God that he believed in.

On the first one, I have stated this and people have contradicted it, but I still think it's true. I think that the only beauty that he could accept, what he saw as beauty, was a nature under stress. When he talks about the sunrise--most people, especially Romantics, will look at the sunrise as a beautiful, serene spectrum of color and something that gives them peace--he talked about it as "the boiling furnace," "the burning furnace of the sun," which it is, actually, more than this other idea.

The coast that he loved and saw beauty in was all the gnarled trees and the sandblasted rocks and the burned hills when the sun would scorch the hills. It was all beauty under stress and tortured and very dynamic. I don't think I can think of any place where he describes the other part of beauty, which I think is just as much of a part--say, a spring in the midwest, or the birds, or flowers.

Field: Well, there's nothing soft in his approach to nature. I think he adored those aspects of nature that you speak of, of nature under stress, but I don't agree with you that that was all he loved. I think he loved the hard rock, the great rocks. He wasn't a man to go to "the green pastures near the still waters." He went to the hard rocks and to the turbulent sea, to the sky, which was filled with a kind of magnificent wonder always to him.

Brophy: He loved the storm by temperament. I remember his nephew [grandson]

Brophy: told me that. I brought it up when I was down there that I was a little bit upset that I didn't see Carmel in the sunshine. It was very foggy and stormy. And he said, "Well, this is what my grandfather loved."

Field: Oh, this is the Jeffers climate.

Brophy: Yes. I look on it somewhat as a limitation, but I don't think I can say it's a limitation of him as a poet. I think each poet has to have his own particular emphasis, or his own particular love.

Field: Yes. There's a woman poet who has written very little, so you might not have heard of her. Her name is Abby Evans and she's in the public eye some now. She just got one of the interesting awards lately. She is like him in that respect. She writes almost entirely not about soft rain and flowers, though she does have a wonderful poem [inaudible], but for the most part, her great poems are all poems dealing with the [inaudible] of the rocks and their evolution and the crystal that forms in the rocks. She has a poem that really just knocks you over it's so good, that deals with this formation of the crystal over a million years, beginning with a little pinprick, as she says, and she says, "Never think the rock doesn't feel the pinprick when first the crystal begins its long, geologic journey."

Brophy: You will be very interested in these poems. [Points to Jeffers' poems discussed before]

Field: Oh, I certainly will. I'm going to write right away, or I'm going to phone about them. Random House--what's it called?

Brophy: The Beginning and the End.

Field: Yes. I wonder why I didn't hear about it. Of course, I've been so ill and so removed.

Brophy: He talks about exactly that type of thing. The first poem is about the universe expanding and contracting, this tremendous dynamism in the universe, and he describes that as the heart of God, the pumping of the blood of the universe.

The second one from The Beginning and the End starts from the formation of the earth, according to most theories, anyway, and the cooling of the atmosphere and the lightnings. It's really a treatise on evolution, but done in four days. That's the second poem.

In this, he comes to a very, very interesting thing to me. The question that I was going to ask you was: Do you think that

Brophy: he showed any sign in his life of developing this philosophy of life he had? I have the impression that he did not. Maybe I shouldn't prejudice your answer by giving you my impressions all the time, but I have the feeling he's fairly consistent from the very beginning. He hasn't got any new ideas.

Yet, here he talks about man--let me see if I can find the line. These are men. [Begins reading from Jeffers' poem] "They feel and know them: so the exultations and agonies of beasts and men are sense-organs of God: and on other globes throughout the universe much greater nerve-endings enrich the consciousness of the one being who is all that exists. This is man's mission: to find and feel; all animal experience is a part of God's life."

So, he makes man the consciousness of God, really. He says all things are aware, but man is uniquely aware. He has a special type--or he expresses it in a way as though it were merely a more complicated set of nerve endings, but this is neither here nor there, I don't think. What he is saying is that man's consciousness is God's consciousness. I don't know whether this is a new idea or not.

Field: I don't think it's new. I think it comes from the East. I think there's a great deal of Eastern philosophy that unconsciously is part of Jeffers' thinking. I mean that all things are one and that each of us is a consciousness of God--that is, the deeper part of us, that capital, that thing that Jung took from the East, that capital Self, you know, that they have, that Self which is below the lesser self rather than above it. That is the consciousness of God. And that is really the driving force within us.

Brophy: That gives man much more of an ability and he admits this freely, I think, in this poem, that man has at least a greater potentiality for nobility than all other things.

Field: Yes. I wish he had lived long enough to read the French philosopher I'm trying to read [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin]. [Pauses]

Fry: I'll take advantage of this break to turn the tape over, Sara. [Turns tape]

Brophy: This man was a member of my order.

Field: Oh, I didn't know that. I presume it said so, but I'm so far into the book now that I've forgotten the facts about it. Oh, it's wonderful. Wouldn't Jeffers have loved that?

Brophy: You know, that's instructive. I wish he had known about something like this.

Field: It's very hard reading for me because I've had so little scientific training and he's a great paleontologist, as you know.

Brophy: Yes. Huxley is a great supporter of it.

Field: Oh yes, Huxley has a fine introduction to it. Julian, not the other Huxley [Aldous Huxley].

I just wanted to show you--please excuse me. This is not for any reasons of any pride, because I can't take pride in anything I've done because I don't think I've brought my work to a finish, for reasons that were personal. But I wanted to show you what Jeffers wrote on the back of my Barabbas, because it illustrates a side of his nature that I think we should speak of since we've talked so much about his love of the hard rock and the turgent sea.

He was extremely kind and generous to young poets. He would take time to write them a few lines that they could use as common [inaudible], or he would do a thing like this, you see, that was on the back of my Barabbas, which I think is extremely wonderful because it shows he had really read it.

Brophy: [After reading Jeffers' comment] That's very good.

Field: That's a very touching tribute, isn't that, because you feel it came from a man who was too honest to say a word that he didn't really believe. So I was very moved by that.

Brophy: That's very true.

Field: I had a good many kindly criticisms, but none that moved me more than that one did.

Brophy: That's very nicely expressed too.

Field: But there was that gentle side of his nature and, in fact, he gave the impression--and curiously, now--of a gentle person. He gave the impression of a man who was carved, as someone has said, out of stone, as far as his outer appearance went, but that had the heart of a child, in a way.

Fry: Was he always this very gentle person around you?

Field: Well, I never saw him in any other way. He had one of the most gentle voices, which is a redeeming thing, and all the actions I saw--his petting of his dog, the way he would do it, and the love he had of his dogs, and the gentleness toward his young sons and Una--were very marked.

- Brophy: That's why people are wrong when they read into some of the expressions that he was a cruel man. It's really a difficult question to answer. In this poem that I was interested in, "Apology For Bad Dreams," the very first strophe is something that has turned a classmate of mine just against Jeffers completely and, well, I think she doesn't understand what she's doing. He describes a woman beating a horse and then, after the horse almost breaks away, she ties the horse's tongue with a rusty chain to a tree. The remark of this classmate was that anybody who would even think about things like that is a beastly person.
- Field: Of course, that's a very superficial judgment, isn't it, because as a matter of fact, it was just that kind of cruelty in man against which he preached, so to speak, almost through his poetry. I think also that it emphasizes the point you made that you feel that he often had these terrible dreams, but perhaps I think of them as coming for a different reason, not so much because he was afraid of being cruel, but because cruelty haunted him`so. The cruelty of war--now, the [inaudible] last books, which [inaudible] good poetry at all, [inaudible] blistering hatred of war and those who permitted it.
- Brophy: That's The Double Axe.
- Field: The Double Axe, yes. I couldn't think of the title.
- Brophy: Where he mentions Roosevelt and Churchill?
- Field: Yes! With almost hatred. I think there is hatred there.
- Brophy: Was there a time in his life when he had a belief in the possibility of the betterment of man through some type of organization? This probably was before you knew him. Someone has said that he was very interested in Wilson and what Wilson was trying to do.
- Field: Yes, he was.
- Brophy: And that he was terribly let down when this thing fell to pieces.
- Field: Oh, he was! It was a great shock to him.
- Brophy: Possibly the reason that he was willing to go into the First World War was that if America got into it, America would be able to do something about the world.
- Field: Absolutely. I think that disillusionment and, really, the painful shock to his whole being that came when none of the things that Wilson had so magnificently phrased came about, and, as you say,

- Field: I think it was the turning point in his feeling about everything else that happened afterwards in human terms. I think you should go into that quite deeply. I think that's a very fine psychological point to enlarge on.
- Fry: As I sit here listening to you two, it just seems like there were so many contradictions in this man, that this is almost the major theme of his life, these contradictions.
- Field: I don't think there were contradictions. I think there were turning points in his life, but as I say, this one--for instance, you see, when Wilson came out with his Fourteen Points, they were so noble and would so have remade social conditions in the West, certainly, that when they failed and Wilson was turned down and really became a sick man from it, or a sicker man, I think that we find that he [Jeffers] lost the last shred of feeling he had that there might be a human evolution coming through these further outbreaks of war.
- Fry: The thing that seemed curious to me about it was not so much that he lost hope for human beings to help themselves, but that there he was identifying with this movement, which classifies him to me as a man connected with action, to do something about this. Later on, I don't find that true in his life.
- Brophy: Well, that's what Sara openly wrote in this--
- Fry: So that he shatters my favorite theory that once you're action-oriented, you usually stay that way, although the directions and the methods of your action can change greatly. But Jeffers seems to have lost this entire--
- Field: I think he did. That is, he turned entirely from the idea that we were progressing any further through what happened after the Wilson debacle.
- Brophy: If he would have lived with a certain vigor up through these times that we're going through now, do you think he would have continued his attitudes? I, myself, think that there is quite a bit of hope justified by what the world has done, what the United Nations, or what people of the United States, or other people of the world have done towards helping--
- Field: Well, he lived to see the United Nations, but that didn't overcome whatever a shock it was that he'd endured.
- Brophy: Things like the United Nations helping the underprivileged or underdeveloped nations, our sending a Peace Corps--this type of thing--or our changing attitudes towards the rights of people, even in our country. Although I think you mentioned one time in

- Brophy: one of the former interviews that he had definite racial attitudes that might not make him happy about integration.
- Field: Oh, very definitely. That was one of the most nonunderstandable things in his character, unless it came from Una. That was his great and almost, you might say, terrible and bitter aversion to certain races, especially the Chinese. I don't know what he felt about the Negro, who was more or less quiet at that time and hadn't risen with this fury to get his rights. I don't know whether he would have been sympathetic toward all this effort of the Negro or not.
- Brophy: But for the helping of other nations to develop their own sense of maturity that is going on in the world right now, some of it through the force of a sort of competition on the part of Russia or the United States to get the support of the nations--it's true that it's selfish in a way, but it is doing quite a bit of good for the people of the world. Man is helping man to an extent that he--
- Field: Man is trying to help man, which is something. Look at the mess we're in in Vietnam, for instance. I have a feeling that the Pope ought to come right straight out--and I think Pope John would have--and protest against this horrible massacre and attack on the Buddhists. But what Jeffers would have thought of that is beyond the pale.
- Brophy: Getting back to Chita's questions on contradictions, there's one contradiction that strikes me. When you said that he was an escapist, this made a lot of sense to me. It sums up many things about him. But he preached in his poetry a meeting with life, an acceptance of pain, and an acceptance of suffering as the essential part of reality, that at least one cannot escape pain, and what civilization is doing is trying to turn away from it, trying to avoid facing up to this dynamic and painful reality. He seemed to preach that and, yet, in his life he was avoiding any painful contacts. In that "Apology," which--it strikes me more, I think, in that last poem--he seems to have been avoiding any tragedy in his own life by whatever he meant by inventing victims so he wouldn't be a victim himself.
- I don't know what to say. I've struggled a little bit with the idea and I don't know just what to do with it. He preached a facing up to pain and an embracing of tragedy, going beyond it, and, yet, he himself seemed to avoid it, as any human being, I guess, would tend to. But he was saying the opposite. Do you know what I mean?
- Field: I do. Of course, I wonder if what he meant by the avoidance of pain wasn't the exposure to people en masse. That, to him, was,

Field: a kind of agony. That's what I meant by escape. He ran away from crowds because it hurt him too much. He was too terribly bruised by all things which he described again and again as part of what he felt was crowd psychology, mass psychology. I think it was pain to him to have to come into contact with it in any way.

Brophy: He seemed to be pained with the presence of people that he wasn't completely sure of.

I think again it was Mrs. Lilienthal who said that when he and Una would come to their house when they were in Carmel and there would be a visitor who would like to talk to him, who was especially interested in him as a person or as a writer, he would go out of his way to--he'd suggest, "I want to go and do the dishes," and he'd go and do the dishes. He'd do it until this other person finally would give up and leave the house.

Field: I never knew anyone who wanted to talk less about himself and his work than Jeffers. You know how many there are that are garrulous on the subject. No, he was just the opposite and I am sure that what Mrs. Lilienthal told you is true. We never, when they came to Los Gatos, except on one occasion, had anyone else there except them, so we could visit. But we soon learned not to try to draw Jeffers out about himself or his poetry.

I remember the one time I speak of that we did have visitors. It was when we didn't expect them there--the visitors, I mean. We expected Jeffers to come up. They were coming up to have lunch with us, just for the ride. He loved our hills so much, the Los Gatos Hills, and it was a beautiful day and they were coming for lunch. Then she called up and said that Mabel Luhan--this was in the days in which they were just like this [gestures], you know--and her Tony had turned up and could she bring them along? Well, it was a buffet lunch anyway, so we said, "Sure, come." Well, even with them there, it made him be silent. He just couldn't talk in any kind of groups whatsoever.

I'm going to tell you something that I haven't spoken of before, but I felt very worried about this friendship with Mabel Luhan. I knew her reputation of wrecking people and I took Una aside and I said, "Una, I am going to tell you not to go down to her ranch this summer. You know she is a woman that seems to have poisoned pots set around her house somehow. My husband and I, who have been invited, would not think of going, not because we don't think we're safe, so to speak, but we don't want to see the miseries of others that go down there.

- Field: And Una said, "Oh, you know, it's awfully good for the boys. They have horses to ride and they have a good time. We go largely for their sakes." And also she said, "Mabel has lots of interesting visitors coming and going." So, I feel that one reason she didn't want to speak much to me about what happened afterwards was because she knew that I was fearful of the result, less fearful, as a matter of fact, in their case [than] of almost any. And yet, even so, I didn't think that it was a good exposure for them, especially if they didn't need it.
- Brophy: Do you think that Mabel was in love with Jeffers in any way, attracted to him?
- Field: I think she was. She certainly wasn't happy with Tony any more, but he wouldn't let her get a divorce. He told her he'd kill her if she tried to get a divorce and she was afraid of him.
- Oh, that was a lurid group down there, I tell you!
- Brophy: Was Una very seriously injured by this?
- Field: No. She shot herself in the side and it healed up very quickly and she hushed [it] up very much right away.
- Fry: I got the impression from our other interview that she was more or less whisked back to Carmel for her--
- Field: Well, no, she wasn't. That was one of the things that we all held against Mabel so much. Instead of putting her on the plane and sending her home, she wouldn't do anything of the kind and Una had to be driven home from there.
- Fry: Was Jeffers with her?
- Field: Yes. That was a very, very bad situation.
- Brophy: When Jeffers was composing his poetry, the way it's been described to me, he'd do it in the morning. He'd write in the morning and then he'd work on his property in the afternoon, or he'd do something outside. Then, at night, he'd think over what he was going to do the next day, think over the verses, and so forth. Did he take notes or anything do you think when he went out into this land that he loved? I think his greatest poetry comes out of the descriptions that he made of this tremendous beauty about him. Or did he have such an artistic imagination and active imagination that he could store this up and go back?
- Field: I think that latter is the truth. I don't know. I can't answer positively, but I can't see him as a man who took pencil

Field: and note paper or any other method of transcribing. I think they were all transcribed through his imagination on his mind.

I've heard a very interesting story which I haven't confirmed that if he woke up in the night and thought about a good line or lines that he would scratch them on the wall by his bed.

Fry: It would have been easy to confirm if someone could have gotten into his bedroom. [Laughter]

Field: I [inaudible] too late.

Fry: Yes. I mean, this is something we could ask other people.

Brophy: Did he do his poetry for the most part because he felt this is something that he was very excited about--not excited in the sense that you could notice it, but he felt moved to write it? Or was quite a bit of the force behind or the reason why he wrote all his poetry the pushing that he got from his wife? The reason that I ask that is that someone said that he or she noticed--I've forgotten who actually said it--that Una would tell him, "You have to write. Now, go upstairs," almost as though he were a child.

Field: Yes, I think that's true. I think, as I told you before, she was an extremely dominant woman and I think she felt that he needed her urgency behind him to keep him from brooding because of his sufferings, because it was real inner suffering that he had about the world.

I think if you believe in man, as he does, in his being the consciousness of God, I think that to see him, as he thought, wrecking his existence, must have been a kind of agony.

Brophy: And there is that important thing that he did of man. What did I do with that book? Here it is. [Picks up book] I wanted to read the last lines of this page that I talked about where I read that he said that man was the sense organ of God. The last lines are: "The hawks are more heroic, but man has a steeper mind, huge pits of darkness, high peaks of light, you may calculate a comet's orbit or the dive of a hawk, not a man's mind." This to me says quite a bit about a love and an interest and a hope for man, something rather rare. I'd take that as one of maybe four or five places where--

Field: He means that you can't calculate a man's mind with the dive of a hawk. You see, he really--deep down, man just lives a--have you read this book, The Phenomenon of Man [by Teilhard de Chardin]?

Brophy: I have begun it, but I haven't read it all.

Field: Well, it's a very hard book to read because I constantly have to look up words and many of them I can't find. They're so scientific. You know what I mean? He's a great scientist. There's a lead-up to his concluding part, that man has had, you might say, in the course of evolution, this element of love enter into his nature, and his love of others, not the love that the lion has for her cubs only, but he really has been able to extend it to others. But to lead up to that, you have to go through masses of scientific matter and millions of geologic years!

Fry: Well, maybe some of us had just better trust him and read only the last part! [Laughter]

Brophy: He was a very difficult man. When he was teaching in France, some of these ideas were very unpopular to a conservative element, so they put pressure on his superiors to remove him from the college. I guess they put so much pressure that his superiors sent him to China. He went to China and what did he do, but he found Peking man. You know that he was part of that expedition.

Fry: Oh, he was?

Field: Was he? I hadn't come to that.

Brophy: It was rather ironic.

Field: Isn't that ironic!

Fry: This passage about the hawk being heroic but man's mind being more steep, I'm not sure means that Jeffers had any more respect for mankind than he does in his--

Field: Oh, that "deep pits of darkness, high peaks of light"--yes, I think he sees the duality in man.

Brophy: That he's more capable of good and evil.

Field: Yes.

Fry: This is that same theme coming out again.

Brophy: And he rarely admits so much--

Field: Father, have you ever thought of bringing out the fact that the hawk seemed to be almost a symbol to him of something important?

- Brophy: The hawk and the rock.
- Field: He seems to care more about the hawk than any other bird. He refers to seabirds now and then, but the hawk appears again and again in his poetry.
- Brophy: Yes. It has puzzled me. Many people have discussed it. I don't know how deeply they have gone into it. He uses it to such an extent that it's almost repetitive.
- Field: Yes, I know it. But that very fact is significant.
- Brophy: It's a fierce, independent, very stark—it accepts reality completely on its own basis.
- Field: And ruthless.
- Fry: Would it be a symbol of escape too? You know, the flight.
- Field: No.
- Brophy: No, I don't think so. I think it's the independence of this bird, its fearless attitude toward reality, its acceptance of life on its own terms, and living it out.
- Field: And with its kind of ruthlessness. That's what makes me feel as if it has the combination he speaks of in the poem that Father just read us. It has both "pits of darkness" and "high peaks of light."
- Fry: Nobility.
- Field: Yes. Yes, he loved the hawk.
- Fry: There's nothing in either one of these symbols of gentleness, is there?
- Field: No. When I say he was a gentle man, I'm only speaking of his own personal--
- Fry: Yes. I'm lining up symbols against the man.
- Field: I think that there was something rock-ribbed that must have been in him to be able to write poetry that deals with nature in her sternest aspects so continuously.
- Brophy: I think he makes a distinction between the cruelty of the cormorants and the hawk and the pelicans and the mountain lion, which is a cruelty according to their own nature. This part of the pain that is necessarily part of life. If you have a dynamic

Brophy: universe, you're going to have life and death and pain. He makes a distinction between that and unnecessary cruelty, which he would say war is because it's pointless, it doesn't prove anything, and it's a matter of men being duped by leaders into killing each other, and the same with the cruelties of, say, this woman beating the horse, where there's no point to it. If there were some point to it, then perhaps it would make some sense. I mean, he would accept it.

Although in one place--I think it's in "Give Your Heart to the Hawks," as I remember--he condemns a farmer for poisoning the squirrels that are breaking up his field, where you can almost turn that back on him and say, "This man is living life according to the laws of nature. He's not doing a useless, pointless thing."

Field: Well, I don't think that he's an easy man to sum up, either in his being, his personal being, or in his thinking. But I do think that there's no doubt about it at all that he loved what is powerful and magnificent. That's so evident in the [inaudible]. He's not given to writing poetry of lesser things, lesser to him.

Brophy: Was he sensitive to lesser things?

Field: I think he must have been because Una was always bringing him flowers and looking them up to find their names and he always seemed interested in that.

Brophy: One of the things that I remember about his daughter-in-law was--he has a poem in here called "The Shears." He describes a rose that was outside their window there at Tor House and it would be looking in on the light inside and that his daughter-in-law, in her very efficient and busyway, one day went out and cut that rose and put it in a vase inside the room. It's a very nice little picture. But then he takes that thing and he uses it as an example of a symbol of our death and being brought into this universe that we've been watching. By death we're not destroyed, but we become part of this thing that we've been a spectator of. This makes it a little bit more grim. It takes it away from the pretty beauty.

Field: Yes, yes. Well, I'm longing to read those poems. I am very fortunate to possess a first edition of Flagons and Apples and of Californians, which are very--

Brophy: Very important.

Field: And [inaudible] and he saidm "These are our last copies, but we'd rather you'd have them than [inaudible]." [Laughter] She [inaudible] accept my own copy. So, I feel that in giving

- Field: up Hungerfield, you might say, robbing my collection of being wholly complete, I was a very noble woman [laughter] with regrets for being noble! No, I'm really not. If they don't put the Grabhorn books, because they're so beautiful, out of the reach of people--I don't feel so at all, but I'm afraid they do that a good deal. I'm afraid those are the fine books that you'd have a hard time to get at.
- Fry: Well, yes. The library does have a very carefully kept collection of Grabhorn.
- Field: I know it.
- Fry: Well, you should at least have a photographed copy, Sara, [laughter] to take in lieu of the one you've given up.
- Field: I can buy at least, as you say, a trade edition.
- Brophy: The trade edition here. It's Hungerfield and Other Poems. It's not in print.
- Field: Did Random House do that?
- Brophy: Yes. It's a little hard to get now and it's very strange that it is. It was published in 1951. It was published right after her death. She died in '50, didn't she, Una?
- Field: Yes.
- Brophy: You'd think that a book that was published in--I think it was a fairly large edition--in 1951 would be available, but it seems to be in that interim stage of not being on the bookshelves of new books and not coming in from peoples' libraries. It's not considered an old or a valuable book yet, so they don't turn up in rare book places.
- Field: Well, you see, Bennett Cerf, who's the publisher of my last book, not this one--he wishes now he hadn't been the publisher. But I'll write him personally and see if he can't get me a copy.
- Brophy: That's the way to move. You might ask him in your letter--I have a pet project. I think that Jeffers should be published in a paperback edition. I think someone--I'm offering myself right now as the someone--should make a collection of poems, one long poem and a number of representative short poems, to be presented to the public not to make money for Random House, but to keep Jeffers before the eyes and interests of the people. I think that Random House in the long run would fare well by such a move because, as it is now, they sell this book [holds up book] for something like \$3.50, I guess, but the closest you can get to

- Brophy: Jeffers is a \$6.00 book and college boys and girls aren't going to pay that.
- Field: No. And they can get them out from the library, of course, a college library, but, of course, you can't keep that long enough to really absorb it. I mean, any book of poems has to be absorbed, just read.
- Brophy: Yes. Something you could carry around and just use. I think practically every other American author appears in paperback editions, but Random House doesn't follow that policy. See, they have a number of good things like James Joyce's Ulysses. They've never allowed that for paperback and I can understand that. This is a popular book already. At least, people know very well about Joyce. But Jeffers is not so well known and he should be. He's not going to be enjoyed and treasured by people at six dollars an introduction. They'll pay six dollars after they've gotten to like them, as I did myself. So, I have gotten discouraged on it, but I'm trying to--
- Field: Have you written Random House?
- Brophy: Well, I wrote a letter and then the man that encouraged me to write the letter came back from contact with Random House and he was rather bitter about the way they reacted toward him.
- Fry: He helped Random House with all their Faulkner.
- Brophy: Yes. He's a professor and he had encouraged me to do this and when he came back, he said he brought up the subject and he said the representative that he talked to--it wasn't Cerf--was rather indifferent. He didn't say yes or no and then he went on to a rather petty business proposition with this professor. He was rather disgusted with what he thought was a very mercenary attitude on their part.
- Field: I hate to hear that.
- Brophy: Now, maybe this is an isolated incident. Maybe I shouldn't have been scared off, but I just didn't send the letter. But I have it. I might as well try it again.
- Field: Well, you know what I think? Have you got your car here?
- Fry: Yes.
- Field: If you've got time, I think I'd like to take you all to lunch.
- Fry: Oh, marvelous. Do you have time?

- Brophy: Sure.
- Field: I'll have to come right straight back here and get my rest. You didn't need any more?
- Brophy: I don't think so.
- Field: I wish I could help you more than I did. I think this letter will help you. If I loan it to you, when will I get it back?
- Brophy: I wonder, could I get a copy of it? Then I could give it right back.
- Fry: Would that be all right, Sara, if we photographed it?
- Field: Yes.
- Fry: That would be the easiest thing to do. [Discussion of details of borrowing letter]
- Field: Didn't she write a nice clear handwriting? [Speaking of Una's handwriting in the letter]
- Brophy: Yes, she did. I wish she'd taught him some of that. [Laughter]
- Field: I have one or two letters from him. They're certainly hard to read.
- Brophy: We have one manuscript of his at North Carolina and it's very, very hard to read anything that he's written. I guess he could read it.
- Field: And Una must have been able to read it because she read all his manuscripts for him at that time.
- Brophy: Did she criticize any of his work before it was published?
- Field: Oh, I think very likely. Very likely. Of course, she had a profound faith in him [inaudible] long before he was famous. We knew him you know, I mean, in these days when some of these pictures are taken. By the way, what became of those?
- Brophy: They're right here and I'm going to take a look at them.
- Field: I'd like to take a look at those. They're so charming. There's one with Steffens. There's one with George Sterling.
- Brophy: I would like to see this George Sterling. I've never seen a picture of him. Is he the one that--the man who was doing the thesis on Bohemianism and came down to pick up some of

Brophy: George Sterling's--

Field: Well, he's a poet, you know. At one time he was considered a great poet. I don't know who all these are. [Looking at pictures] You can see them all.

Oh, I love this of the little boys! There they are, standing by what he'd love, one of the great rocks.

Brophy: They look different in that. I mean, they don't look like twins.

Field: I feel terribly that I didn't see anything of Jeffers in his last days.

Brophy: I think probably it would have been very painful to see him.

Field: I suppose it would have been.

Brophy: I think he collapsed pretty much in his interests and everything else.

Field: Yes, after Una--I went to see him once after Una died. I was taken by Noel Sullivan. Then Noel died, you know.

Now, here's one that Una's written on the back of: [Reads from back of picture] "Garth and Donnan with their little [inaudible]."

Brophy: [Looking at pictures] They're sad looking in that, aren't they?

Fry: Oh, look at those children!

Field: I think probably Jeffers, who had in him, for all his philosophic view of man and so much feeling of despising, wouldn't have minded that the boys were not a success. You see, they couldn't make college. I don't think that it bothered him too much, but I think she was very disappointed. I think she thought they were going to be great men.

[Looking at picture] There's Una standing in the rocks.

Brophy: She was a beautiful woman.

Field: Oh, she was very beautiful! I love this picture. I'm picking out the ones I love best. [Looking at another picture] That's Una.

Fry: Oh, and Robin's smiling!

Field: Yes, he's actually smiling.

Brophy: And that's their old Ford that they used to travel around in.

Fry: The whole family looks pretty happy there.

Field: There she writes, "Ella Young and the three Jeffers."

Brophy: Did he go out riding a number of times during the week, or every day? He used to go out--

Field: Oh, they went out a good deal, yes, riding or walking. Here's "Ella Young and the three Jeffers at Tor House on a day of great storm, Candlemass Day." [Reads from photograph]

Now, this is one I like. Here's Steffie. [Lincoln Steffens] He was our closest man friend, you know, much closer than we could ever have gotten to Jeffers.

Brophy: Who was this now?

Field: Lincoln Steffens.

Brophy: Is he the one holding the little boy?

Fry: Yes.

Field: [Looking at photograph] There's George Sterling. You can't get much of a view of him there.

Fry: Oh. He looks so grim here, Sara.

Field: Who? George? Oh, he wasn't grim. He was powerful. You know, he committed suicide in the end. [Pause]

Brophy: These are very good pictures here. I've never seen anything--

Field: [Reads] "Here's Robin and the boys on their thirteenth birthday," she writes. There aren't many that are written up on the backs.

Brophy: Now this is the first one I've seen before, and this one [points to picture] I think Mrs. Bennett used in her book. That's the only one I've seen before of any of these.

Field: And this is his hawk tower? [Shows another photograph]

Brophy: Who is the man in this picture with the very thorough beard? He looks like Walt Whitman?

Fry: That's Erskine.

Field: That's my husband.

Brophy: Is that right? I should have recognized him from over here.
[Looks at another photograph]

Field: Yes. They really quite understood each other in a curious kind of way.

Brophy: His grandson took me up into this tower last year and that was a very fascinating part of my summer.

Field: Of course, it must have been.

Fry: Oh, he took you clear up into the tower?

Field: You know, Una had a--is her little organ still there?

Brophy: Yes, the organ is still there.

Field: She used to take her hair down--I think it made her feel more Romantic--and sit up in that tower and sing Irish songs, which was lovely, in a way.

Brophy: He didn't have a taste for music, did he?

Field: Not much, no. No, he didn't.

Brophy: Now, is this George Sterling here? [Points to photograph]

Field: No, I don't know who that is. Oh, wait a minute. It tells on there. [Reads from picture] "Robin and Frederick Mortimer Clapp, the author of your two tall volumes on [inaudible]." Oh, yes. "A friend of mine since 1904 and one of the most interesting people we've ever known."

Brophy: He is the one that suggested that they go to Carmel, I think.

Field: Is he?

Brophy: I think so. I think he originally gave them the idea.

Fry: Who is this, Sara, [points to photograph] besides Erskine and--?

Field: This is I and this is Kay, my [daughter], a little girl, a young girl [inaudible]--

Robin looks very happy there--pleasant, I think.
[Points to photograph]

Brophy: He looks good and pleasant in this one too. [Points to another photograph] Who is the extra--?

Field: I have to say that he loved my husband. They really got along well together.

Oh, this is my daughter's husband and this is my daughter and this is myself. [Points to photograph]

Brophy: Those are good pictures. Usually, he is posed, I think, by magazine editors, you know, magazine men.

Field: Oh, I know. These were all taken by Una herself, or where she's in it, she would set the camera and have one of us hold it right and snap it.

Brophy: [Pointing to another photograph] Is the little boy a grandson of yours, then? Who is the little boy?

Fry: Oh, I'll bet that's Pete Steffens.

Field: That's Pete Steffens. That's little Pete. Now he's a professor at the University of California, is married, has got a baby of his own, and lives near me on Keith Avenue. I must show him some of these pictures. He'll love them.

Brophy: [Laughter] You could do a little blackmail with them.

Fry: Yes! [Laughter] Is that taken at The Cats? [Looks at photograph] Who's the girl?

Field: Oh yes, it's taken at The Cats all right, because those are our big dogs and that's Tashie [Katherine Smith], one of our grandchildren.

Fry: My goodness!

Field: I'm quite sure she is, although she never wore earrings. Has she got on earrings? She's too little a girl.

Fry: No.

Field: Oh, just a shadow.

Fry: Yes. She has a strand of hair hanging down.

Brophy: Is this at your home? [Points to another photograph]

Field: Yes, [inaudible]. That contradicts my speaking of the [inaudible].

[Looking at other photographs] I don't remember these. I don't know whether that was Kay's wedding or not.

Brophy: This evidently is Mr. Davidson, or is it?

Field: Yes, that's Jo Davidson, doing that [inaudible].

Brophy: Where is the house here? This isn't Jeffers' house. Is it Davidson's studio?

Field: It must be, yes. I think that was. It must have been at his studio. He had a studio there for a while, just for a little while.

Brophy: This was a fine picture. [Looking at photograph]

Field: Yes, isn't that dear of my house? I just love that. You can have one of those if you like, Chita. Would you like one?

Fry: Yes, I would.

Field: Well, if we're going to go we must--

Brophy: Get organized.

Field: We'll get organized.

Fry: Sara, I wanted to leave this with you here. This is the clipping for the writers' conference that I had told you about.

Field: Oh, yes. I don't think that I've seen that.

Fry: Apparently, this was something that Upton Sinclair was in and so forth, and it doesn't say that Erskine had any particular part in it. The photographer must have just grabbed you out in the lobby.

Field: Outrageous that they didn't, because he made a wonderful speech that time.

Fry: And they said he took part in the program later.

[Discussion of preparations for leaving for lunch]

Brophy: I'm very intrigued that you find this Phenomenon of Man so close to Jeffers because I kept thinking it's too bad that the man didn't have a thing like this to think about.

Field: Yes! I should certainly say so. Yes, I think that what I've read of it--did you find it easy reading?

Brophy: It's very hard. I can't honestly say I've read through it either.

- Field: Oh, I read about three paragraphs and then I have to stop and look up words and think about what he's saying. I don't think I'll ever finish at this rate.
- Brophy: I guess this is quite a bit of his life's work expressed there, trying to at least bring it to a--
- Field: Yes, I think very likely.
- Brophy: Were there any other letters of particular reference or particular interest?
- Field: Well, there are some other letters, but I won't say anything about them because I don't think any of them express so much about his philosophy. But if you think that you'd get anything from them, I'll loan them to you.
- Brophy: Well, I think only if they did have something of--
- Field: Well, I haven't reread them in years, but let me reread them and see if I find anything.
- Brophy: Fine. I know what you mean. In fact, I don't see any point to universities keeping letters or making a big point of keeping letters that have nothing to do with a man's--
- Field: With a man's [inaudible] or--no, I think not. It's a kind of, I think, idiosyncrasy of the universities.
- Brophy: We have one--I think I told you about it--and all it says is, "I don't have any manuscripts to offer at this time," or something like that.
- Field: And they keep that?
- Brophy: This was put in the catalogues of literary manuscripts as a letter of Robinson Jeffers'. [Laughter]
- Field: Oh, for goodness sakes!
- Brophy: That's just useless.
- Field: Just a mere statement like that! Well, that's what I call idol worship.

[end of interview]

AFTERWORD

Children usually piece together the events of their parents' lives gradually, in no logical sequence, from partially remembered anecdotes, casually mentioned, or deliberately related events. My mother's autobiography confirms what I sensed from early childhood, that she belonged to a world reaching far beyond our home. Just how large that world was and the genesis and expansion of her concern is set down in her oral history with clarity and astonishingly remembered detail. While we could not, as children, appreciate the importance of her work, my brother and I accepted her role in the outside world as a given fact--although not without dismay. For since she was capable of creating intense, joyous excitement, her frequent absences were the more bleak by contrast. The infectious gaiety she brought with her was felt by everyone whose life she touched. My husband, James Caldwell, expressed the sparkle she inevitably evoked by saying, "When Sara comes, it's always a holiday!". She had the gift of giving herself wholly to the moment, not only in gaiety, but in sympathetic concern for individual suffering, always offering help, and for passionate defense of a cause or principle.

Companionship with her was for my brother and me a shining event, after her long absences on the suffrage trail. We entered into the games she devised for us with much laughter and the sense that she was, for the moment, "ours." We were particularly enchanted by her "old witch," an imaginary alter ego which she pretended to consult with mischievous and conspiratorial secrecy when we asked her a question. She was indeed bewitching in the dictionary definition, as in "a particularly charming and alluring woman."

Sharing her was taken for granted, but however long the absences, it never occurred to me that she would not want to return home. And so it was an unexpected and paralyzing shock when she announced suddenly that she was no longer going to share life with my father. I was in my sixth year when she came to me suddenly and said, "Darling, I'm going to leave your father, do you want to stay with him or come with me?". I could not believe her words, for I hadn't the faintest hint that so momentous a change was about to take place. Besides my ignorance of the rift between my parents I had never encountered separation between parents. None of my little friends' parents were divorced. To choose between two parents, both of whom I loved, was a terrible decision. Forced to a choice, I chose to go with my mother. My brother, whom I dearly loved and who adored my mother, stayed behind.

We were to spend a year in Goldfield, Nevada while my mother sued for her divorce. Coming from the land of rose festivals and verdant gardens we found this dry bare country a considerable shock. Even the guide books comment on its aridity. Desert Challenge describes it best: "Goldfield was a waterless and treeless country, in a zone where even the sagebrush gave up

trying to grow, in favor of the low shad scale and the giant yucca, which cast no more shade than a barbwire fence." There was one little oasis in the town, - a small plot of grass owned by a highly paid mine executive. We were told that the monthly water bill for this extravagance came to one hundred dollars! I used to gaze on it with wonder, touching the green blades remembering my father's pride in our Portland garden and the smell of the newly cut lawn. This bit of green was a comforting sight in a dry land.

It was not until some time after we were settled in a little house in that rough mining town that I sensed a new strong presence in our lives, tangible only through the flow of letters and telegrams and the frequent arrival, by freight, of edible delicacies. The sender, of course, was C.E.S.W. Visits to the telegraph and post office (there was no house delivery and I do not remember having a telephone) were a regular part of our lives. My mother used to say, when she took me with her, that the rowdy men about town respected a woman with a child. The telegraph clerk apparently broke his routine day by savoring the messages he recorded. But the telegrams my mother received baffled as well as amused him, for they sounded like meaningless gibberish. This was exactly the effect that they were supposed to have on the unknowing eye since the text was devised in a curious code, deliberately intended to disguise the meaning, and the identity of the sender. The sender was a mystery to me, too. I knew his name was Erskine (later to be called "Pops" by my brother and me) and that steady communication with him was the focus of my mother's life. But I did not then know that she had left my father for love of him. Nor did I know that later, after a long period of rejection by me, he would become a second father to me and a crucial force in shaping my thought and the direction of my life.

Erskine's letters were written in green ink in an easy flowing hand. The green ink was as much a part of his personal style as his long hair and beard. Sight of that ink and hand, when inadvertently discovered by my father in later years, would send him into a rage. For this small evidence of non-conformity reminded my father of C.E.S.W.'s deeper commitment to a personal freedom he abhorred.

My mother spent many hours at her typewriter, writing late into the night. I would lie in bed listening to the pounding of the keys which reassured me that she was "still there." When the sound ceased I was fearful of being left alone. For frequently, her work concluded, she would join a late-night party. Characteristically, she was the vibrant center of a group wherever she might be. Goldfield was no exception. Literate company was scarce, but executives of the gold mine provided tolerable distraction and temporary escape from her loneliness for C.E.S.W.

On Sundays, we dined at the Goldfield Hotel, the only evidence of urban elegance and solidity in town. I loved going there. There were thick flowered carpets, heavy leather-covered chairs, mahogany woodwork, and an elevator I delighted to ride up and down in just as a game. We would sit alone at a table in the big dining room. Mother would order a glass of red

wine for herself and a glass of grape juice for me, my "pretend wine," to make me feel grown up. On one occasion a lady at a nearby table admonished my mother for giving what she supposed to be alcohol to a child. My mother indignantly put her to rights.

Goldfield was undeniably a frontier town. Gypsies in horse-drawn wagons frequently came by, a bull occasionally broke loose, and my schoolmates included the offspring of prostitutes. But the serious threat to our peace of mind was blackmail. My mother would find a note under the door threatening her with damaging evidence in her divorce trial if she did not leave five hundred dollars (big money at that time) under a given tree. I remember going for a ride one night with some of my mother's friends to put an empty envelope under the designated tree. The sheriff was in hiding. Whether or not the criminal was caught I do not know, but I do know that the money was never paid.

The long year's exile in Goldfield came to an end. The terms of the divorce settlement gave custody of the children to my father. My brother, who had stayed behind with our father, had of course been separated from our mother for the duration. Henceforth, by court decree, we were to see my mother weekends and half of vacations. After an interval in Alameda, my father found a house for us in Berkeley, one he exchanged for the abandoned Portland property. He chose Berkeley because he wanted us to grow up in a cultivated academic community. My mother rented an apartment on Russian Hill in San Francisco, in commuting distance from Berkeley. On Fridays, in addition to our brown-bag lunch, we carried a little satchel to school for our weekend stay in San Francisco.

By my father's order, we were never to see "that man" (my father could never bring himself to utter the name of Wood). This stipulation put my mother in a serious dilemma. For how could she say to Erskine when he came down from Portland to see her (as he frequently did) "Erskine, please go away for the weekend since my children are here." So, in order to see my mother, we had to pretend to my father that we never saw "that man." I dreaded C.E.S.W.'s visits which cut into the precious hours with my mother and necessitated lying to my father. There were occasional leaks when some friend, innocent of betrayal, would say in my father's presence "I saw Albert and Kay having lunch at the Palace with the most interesting looking man. He had long hair and a beard." My father's rage on learning that his orders had been breached, that his children were being exposed to the views of an "anarchist" and "free lover," was terrifying. He renewed his threats to forbid our seeing our mother entirely.

On October 12, 1918, my brother Albert was killed in an automobile accident, when he was seventeen, I twelve. I have lived and relived the sequence of events of that tragic day throughout my life. My mother, brother, Pops, and I had been, as my mother describes, on a picnic in Marin county. Pops had never learned to drive, but had persuaded my mother to take driving lessons and she was, consequently, driving the car. We had

intended to go straight back to San Francisco after the picnic, since the auto ferries ran at fairly long intervals. However, my brother wanted to show my mother one of his favorite hiking haunts, and we drove farther on climbing a steep hill, called White's Hill. My brother and I took turns sitting beside my mother on the front seat. Shortly before the accident I moved in front. Since the hill seemed to continue indefinitely without a convenient turning place, my mother attempted to make a U-turn in the road. She put the gear in reverse and we moved slowly back. Suddenly we realized that she was approaching the outside edge of the road. Pops called out, "Sara, put on the brake!" which she did. But it was too late. The edge gave way and the car rolled slowly, turning over and over the forty-foot bank. My mother, brother and I were trapped under the overturned car at the bottom of the canyon. Only C.E.S.W. was thrown free. His nose had been broken, but, dripping with blood he climbed the steep bank to seek help. My mother, who must have been in excruciating pain from a partially severed leg, showed extraordinary fortitude. Though held down by my right arm, I was uninjured. My mother and I shouted "Help!" in unison, hoping to attract the attention of motorists on the highway above. It was a futile effort since on the upward slope engines noisily changed gears, obliterating other sounds. To the terror of being trapped was added the sound of my brother's heavy breathing. I did not know he was dying but knew he must be in great distress. In actuality he was killed by the weight of the car on his chest. According to my mother's account, she was "able to hold Kay in my arms and sing to her, trying to quiet her hysterical terror." This was an impossibility since we were separated and unable to move. For what she did do I am unendingly grateful. Although I realized our peril and would have put little faith in a soothing answer, I asked her if we were going to die. So, when she replied, "Kay, I do not know " the stark honesty was strangely reassuring.

My brother died under the car. We, the survivors, struggled with our disbelief. My mother's physical and psychological anguish were so great that she could not speak to me when I came to her hospital bed. Pops was under sedation. My brother was irretrievably gone. My father, who was out of town on a fund-raising trip for his church, was summoned but had not returned. I dreaded his coming for the accident not only killed my brother but also revealed undeniably our association with "that man." In my desolate isolation I was forced to a self-dependence both bewildering and awesome. It is impossible to exaggerate what the loss of my brother meant to me. For added to the weight of sorrow was the loss of a confident buoyant reassuring ever-present companion on whom I could depend. My mother seemed unaware of the immensity of this loss to me. She says in her oral history "Kay...was very young, and thank God, it doesn't seem to have left any mark on her that I can see. She never refers to it" (p.378). The familial bond between brother and sister was strengthened by separation from our mother and by our common need to stand up to our father's attempt to curtail our visits to her and to devise ways to slip in surreptitious visits. Although we each had separate friends, the weekend trips to San Francisco threw us together in our free time more constantly than most siblings of different ages and sexes.

Furthermore, the endearing reason for these trips bound us together in a special way. In spite of brotherly teasing, Albert showed considerable tenderness toward me. His letters to my mother reiterate his attempt to comfort me in her absence. He tried to compensate, in an older brotherly way, for the insecurity caused by separation from my mother. I adored him and counted on him as an unfailing companion and protector.

In the weeks following the accident, my mother and Pops lived in a rented house in Kentfield, where my mother recuperated from the intricate surgery needed to save her partially severed leg. For months, I was cut off from seeing her since there was no doubt about C.E.S.W.'s being at her side. Finally a visit was arranged, an event never to be forgotten. The visit was prearranged with the assurance that C.E.S.W. would not be in evidence. My mother's sister, Mary Parton, who had come to Kentfield to help her stricken sister, confused the date of our visit. As my father and I approached the porch we saw my mother reclining in a chaise longue. Next to her, his arms about her shoulders, was C.E.S.W. This scene was too much for my father. Jealousy and hatred for the man he felt indirectly responsible for his son's death overwhelmed him. As we retreated through the garden he shouted hysterically, his words ringing through the air, "You killed your son, you killed your son!" I still remember my mother's sobbing and my fury at my father for his cruel accusation--and a sense of total desolation.

So far, the references I have made to my father have shown only his uncontrollable anger. Such a description of him is unfairly one-sided. Circumstances, which he vainly fought to alter, deprived him of his fondest expectations and distorted his emotions. His expectations in marriage were normal for the time; his high regard for women and willingness to share domestic chores, rare. He admired my mother's intellectual capacities, which he frequently acknowledged to be superior to his own, and was wholly sympathetic with her effort toward legalization of women's suffrage. He believed in encouraging women in the sciences and arts. (At a later time he engaged Julia Morgan, then a budding architect, to draw the plans for his Berkeley church.) His social liberalism (he called himself a Christian Socialist) had cost him his church in Cleveland. But he was a fundamentalist Christian, and as such adultery was inconceivable to him. When the blow fell the hurt and outrage were intensified by the status of his rival, who was not only a brilliant lawyer, handsome and urbane, but also inextricably married. To jealousy was added humiliation and disgrace. In vain he appealed to the first Mrs. Wood to remove the disgrace by releasing her husband from the marriage contract. She gave her Catholic faith as the reason for her refusal, saying in addition that she did not want her grandchildren to think of her as a divorced woman. Her children, all adults, stood firmly beside her -- all but the youngest daughter, Lisa, whose compassionate and loving nature enabled her both to comfort her mother and to understand the love her father had for my mother. The eldest son, precisely my mother's age, maintained an uncompromisingly critical stance toward his father and hostility towards my mother until a few years before her death. Suddenly, as though taken by a swift enlightenment, he wrote my mother to affirm his

realization of the depth and closeness of his father's and my mother's relationship, lamenting that this realization had not come before his father's death. For my mother, who longed for reconciliation with her Erskine's family, this was a poignant moment of fulfillment.

My father made frequent appeals to my mother to reconsider her decision to leave home and to return to him. He believed her to be the victim of a temporary infatuation, almost to a fever that would run its course. To him, Wood was a skillful enticer of women, persuasive enough to cause another man's wife to cast aside her Christian principles and to enter a life of sin. For years he held out the hope that "his Sara" would "see the light." Years after she was patently lost to him he would send her flowers on her birthday with the Biblical quote, "Love never faileth." My father's life was shattered. He had lost his wife, his Portland job was no longer tenable, his status was diminished, and as an inadvertent dark consequence of the separation, he had lost his son. My brother and I were the focus of his love. He gave us, in spite of his modest financial resources, a comfortable home in a "good" neighborhood, consistent medical care, music lessons, and excursions to the country, Yosemite and Big Sur, which we learned to love. I lived with my father until my seventeenth year, the year of the Berkeley fire. Our house was destroyed in the conflagration and, although friends of my father offered us temporary quarters, it seemed logical for me to join my mother in San Francisco. Instead of asking if I might go I simply announced (with pounding heart) my decision which, to my amazed relief, my father accepted without contest. After two decades of living alone he entered into a platonic marriage with a pious, churchly woman to whom he could confide his abiding dismay. On his deathbed my father said to her, "Tell Sara I forgive her." While still insisting on being wronged, his forgiveness was not only a capitulation, but also a loving surrender.

My father tried to protect us from what he passionately believed to be the evil influence of the doctrine of free love, openly endorsed and practiced by my mother and C.E.S.W. He viewed their relationship as ungodly and unprincipled. His children above all should be kept from contamination. What he could not comprehend was the complexity, depth, and endurance of their union. It was not the trivial affair of his imagining, but an affinity stemming from and nourished by a love of poetry, ardent commitment to social change, and compassion for human suffering. Ironically enough, it was the tenderness, warmth, compatibility, and mutual devotion that set my mother and C.E.S.W. apart as having an ideal marriage. In her oral history, my mother says "...we were willing to make almost any sacrifice on earth to establish a life together." One of those sacrifices was to relinquish custody of her children to my father -- a condition necessary to obtain her divorce. My brother and I never questioned the "rightness" of the relationship between our mother and Pops. On the contrary, we believed in and defended it, in spite of experiencing occasional social ostracism.

Their rapport was so profound, their delight in one another so fulfilling that they might easily have shut out the world. On the contrary, their home whether on Russian Hill, or later at The Cats in Los Gatos, became a gathering place for poets, musicians, civil libertarians, and leaders of the Jewish cultural community, some of whom Pops had known through his legal connection with the banking firm of Lazard Frères. Mother and Pops were fearless. Two startling instances come to mind. The first had to do with the suffrage campaign. My mother agreed to attend a play, in a San Francisco theater, which portrayed Woodrow Wilson. She agreed, further, to rise in the middle of the play to say, "Mr. President, when will you support the suffrage amendment?" The local suffrage group had guaranteed the presence of a large contingent of their membership which would loudly applaud my mother's question. Unfortunately only a few turned up and instead of thundering applause one heard only the delicate clapping of a few gloved hands. It was said that the actor went white under his white paint. My face (for she had taken me with her for moral support) was flaming with embarrassment. The deed done, but not the play, we rose to leave. The ladies whom we passed on the way out drew their skirts aside in distaste. I was proud of my mother's courage, but hated to see her shunned.

On another occasion, my mother and Pops and Bishop Parsons, of Grace Cathedral, were scheduled to address a meeting to protest the draft (in World War I). The newspapers had announced that the first three speakers (they were the first three) would be arrested. I attended the meeting with apprehension and fear. The hall was filled with police. I fully expected to see my mother and Pops hauled off to jail. They spoke firmly and with deep conviction. No move was made to arrest them, for what I could not have known as a child of eight was the reluctance, at that time, to arrest people of standing in the community. Apparently, however, my father was apprehensive too, for he told me that he had gone to the meeting with sufficient funds to bail my mother out, had the newspaper predictions come true.

It is little wonder that -- devastated by my brother's death, the pain intensified by her inadvertent role at the wheel -- my mother should eventually have a severe nervous breakdown. While her son's death was for her the ultimate personal tragedy, anyone familiar with her poems will recognize in her nature a despondent side. The breakdown, which she does not mention in her oral history, occurred several years after the auto accident, years shadowed by brooding and insomnia. Pops met this crisis in his usual steady, competent, caring way. The house at 1020 Broadway in San Francisco (which became their residence after Pops' final departure from Portland) was turned into a temporary hospital. Extraordinary precautions were necessary for her care. I was about fifteen years old at the time and had succeeded in overcoming my father's objections to regular visits to my mother. As a consequence I had come to accept and love Pops as a second father. Our concern for someone we each loved so dearly drew us together in a new mature, supportive way. We depended upon one another for comfort and hope, for his Sara and my mother was for the duration of the breakdown beyond our reach.

We had no way of knowing how long this isolation from her would last. When, in about a year's time, she regained her joyousness and will to live our own joy was inexpressible. Pops and I were bound together indissolubly by this long period of shared darkness.

But the event that brought all three of us in close and prolonged relationship as a family was a year of travel together in Europe. In 1923, Pops and Mother decided to go to Italy for an indefinite stay with the possibility of permanent residence abroad. They invited me to join them. I announced my decision to accompany them to my father who, to my surprise, put up no opposition. He did not answer, just looked at me steadily. His anger seemed spent and I felt a vague pity for him, a pity that has deepened with the years. From this time on Pops took first place as a father in my life. We roamed the museums of Naples, Rome, and Florence together. He had always been interested in painting--had, indeed, known some of the foremost American painters of the early part of the century--Ryder, Hassam, Weir--and had purchased their works. He was also an amateur painter. He was pleased with my response to painting and sculpture. For although my mother enjoyed the visual arts she was essentially a literary person. This bond between Pops and me was a deep satisfaction to my mother. My interest in art fostered by Pops' teaching, continued throughout my life.

It is apparent from what I have told of my childhood that my contacts with my mother were discontinuous. As a little child, I found the infrequency of our companionship vaguely unsettling, which may account for my mother's description of me as "very gloomy a great deal of the time." Continuity, however, is no guarantee of sympathetic companionship. While it was difficult to grow up in an adult world where I was expected to be more or less "on my own," there were considerable rewards. Poetry and gardens were my mother's enduring passions and she passed on a love of both to me. Poetry, especially, drew us close together. In her poem "Kay" the gloom has become "A shy deep stream of sombre water" from which she finds healing.

Discussions of poetry were an accompaniment to nearly every meal. For Sara and Erskine work was always in progress, and the conversation would center on the current manuscript. From my early teens, I entered into the turbulent literary discussions, never patronized nor put down. Literary friends treated me with equal seriousness. Genevieve Taggard wrote in the copy she gave me of her book, For Eager Lovers, "For Kay Field, who helped with the title." While working on her first volume of poems, The Pale Woman, my mother habitually submitted each poem for my opinion. The book is dedicated "To Albert, a young son who is not here to read, and to Katherine, a young daughter who has read and understood."

I acquired early a favorable bias toward "literary" people who seemed to me to have exceptional liveliness and charm. This partiality toward writers may have caused me to be drawn on first acquaintance to Jim Caldwell. At the time of our meeting he was teaching in the English department of the University of Wisconsin. Meeting him was indirectly the result of my mother's

earlier suffrage activities for she had campaigned for the suffrage amendment with Mrs. Robert La Follette, Sr. When I decided to go to the University of Wisconsin my mother gave me a letter to Mrs. La Follette, who promptly invited me to the La Follette farm outside Madison. It was there that I met Jim. He was an intimate friend of the La Follette family; his college roommate had been Phil La Follette, later governor of Wisconsin.

Jim came out to California in the summer of 1925 to meet Erskine and Sara, the summer's trip conveniently financed by a teaching post at Dominican College. From their first meeting on the Los Gatos hill there was an understanding between them that deepened with the years. My mother and Pops could not have had a more congenial son-in-law. Jim and I were married at The Cats in 1929, under a great spreading live oak which stood at the center of a little amphitheater dedicated to music and poetry. Characteristically, Mother and Pops made a festival of the occasion. Details of the ceremony and the celebration following are told with great affection by them in a book called The Beautiful Wedding.

After receiving his Ph.D. at Harvard, Jim was invited to join the English department at the University of California at Berkeley. Los Gatos was not too far away. The interplay between the academic life as we knew it at Berkeley and the artistic life burgeoning at "The Cats" would take too long to describe. The four of us shared one another's friends. At The Cats, we made friends with Robin and Una Jeffers, William Rose Benet, and Yehudi Menuhin. In Berkeley, we introduced Sara and Erskine to Alex and Helen Meiklejohn, Josephine Miles, and Walter Hart. The intimate interweaving of our lives in Berkeley and Los Gatos continued for fifteen years.

Sara's life with Erskine ended in 1944 with Erskine's death, when he was just short of ninety-two years old. The gap between their ages -- thirty years -- was now a formidable reality, for she faced thirty years of life alone. For several years she stayed on at The Cats, attended by a faithful Italian couple, the Marengos. Sara directed the intensity of her sorrow into preparing a book of Erskine's collected poems, published by the Vanguard Press in 1949. She was encouraged in this undertaking by William Rose Benet, who wrote the introduction. Sara, in addition to choosing the poems, wrote a foreword in which she summarized Erskine's social philosophy.

When Mary and Vincent Marengo were forced by illness and age to retire, the burden of running The Cats became too heavy. No couple could replace the devoted, hard-working Marengos. To find any adequate domestic help in war time was virtually impossible, for the war industries, with their high wage scale, absorbed the best of the labor market. A move to Berkeley was the logical step, although for my mother, a melancholy break with the past. Jim and I helped her with the difficult task of moving the belongings she wanted to keep, disposing of the cumbersome accumulations of a lifetime, and finding a comfortable house in Berkeley.

To find a setting as rural as the Los Gatos hillside was of course impossible. But after a long search we found a stream-side house built deep in the woods of Chabot Canyon, in Northeast Oakland. She took with her many of the beautiful furnishings from The Cats: Chinese furniture and rugs, pictures by Hassam and Weir, a library of poetry, her Steinway piano, and her noble affectionate police dog, Barda. Once she settled, she began planning a garden, harmonious to the woodland setting. She was an intuitive landscape architect. Some people garden for exercise. For Sara, gardening was creative thinking in greens and colored petals. She used to say that most gardens exist in the mind, meaning that the plants one chose for hopeful simultaneous blooming did not always oblige. But for her, they bloomed as punctually and luxuriantly as the pictured flowers in the garden catalogues.

Planning the garden and modifying the house structure were healing distractions from the painful parting from Los Gatos, and to this new setting Mother brought her special kind of pleasurable concentration. She continued to support the many humanitarian causes with which she had been long identified, especially the American Civil Liberties Union, on whose board she served. She entertained her friends and enjoyed a special friendship with Walter Hart, whom she frequently met for long afternoons of literary interchange.

Her pleasure in her new environment was considerable, but all too brief. A surveyor's mark posted on her property was an ominous sign that this small paradise would come to an end. The real estate agent who sold her the property had kept from her the fact that a freeway was planned to cut through her canyon.

Jim and I found her a house close to our own -- architect-designed and surrounded by a garden. To the east was a wooded lot which she eventually purchased. But she was never satisfied with this new location and mourned the loss of the house by the stream.

For some years she continued a mentally active life. It was at this time that she was interviewed for her oral history. But a series of strokes made her dependent on nursing care and shut her away from the active world. In spite of her integrity and strength, I do not think that she recovered psychologically from Erskine's death. In her mind, and in the minds of the many who had known them, Erskine and Sara were inseparable. Albert Bender, a devoted friend, had, in earlier days commissioned Ed Grabhorn to print a volume of selected poems by S.B.F. and C.E.S.W. He asked Jim Caldwell to write the foreword; in it he said, "It is altogether right that their notable companionship should be symbolized by this physical binding together of their poems, which, since they seem often to start from the rich impulse of a shared life, are already closely interbound." For Sara Bard Field Wood, although she tried bravely to carry on alone, her life, in its deepest meaning, ended with his.

Katherine Field Caldwell

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Berkeley, California

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**Joint interview conducted by Amelia R. Fry and Father Robert J. Brophy.

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